

CRAZY



**TOM
MORELLO**

**SCOTT
HEPBURN**

**DAN
JACKSON**

ORCHARD™

VOLUME 3

SCRIPT

TOM MORELLO

ART

SCOTT HEPBURN

COLORS

DAN JACKSON

LETTERS

NATE PIEKOS OF BLAMBOT®

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ORCHID VOLUME 3

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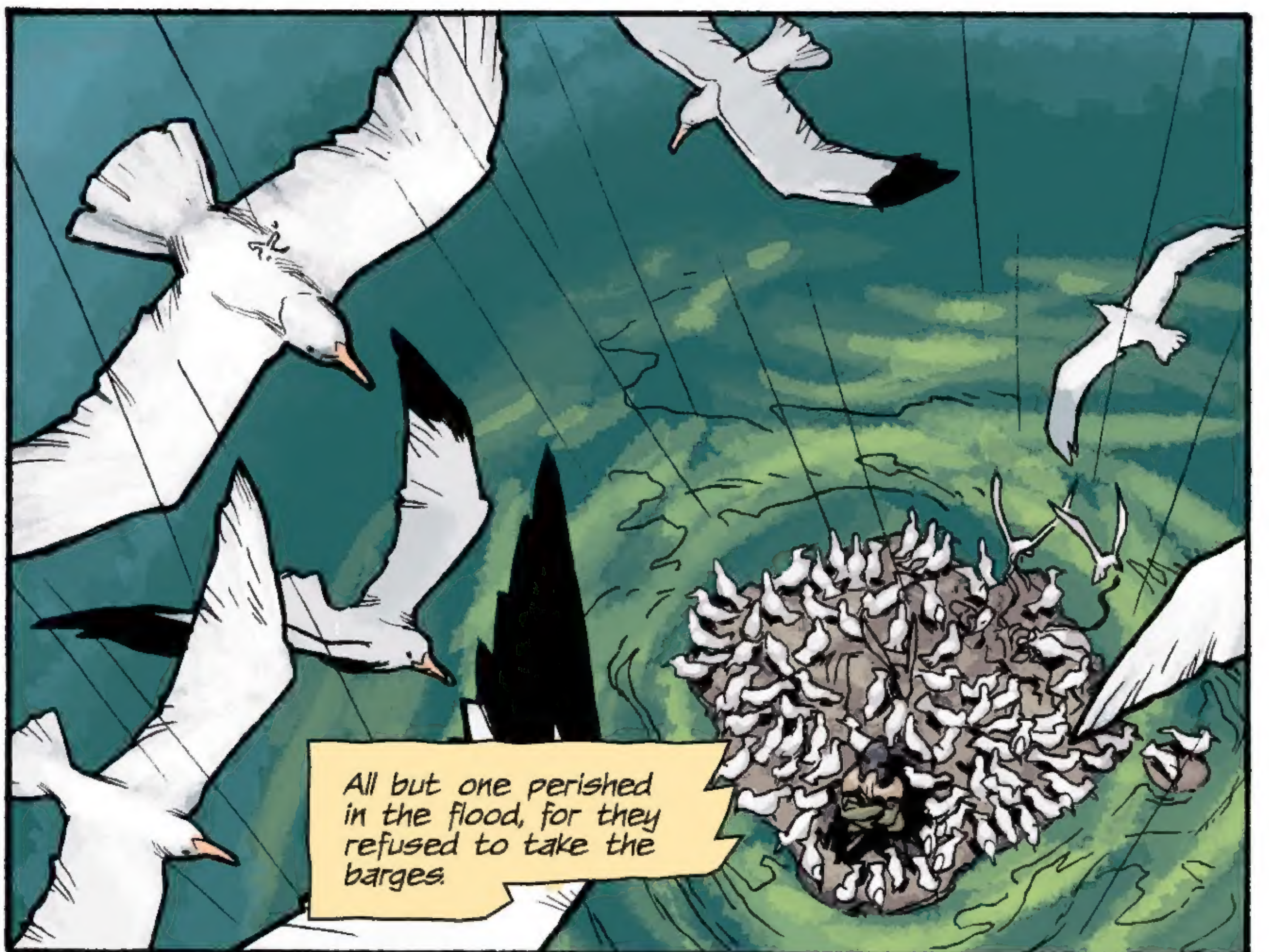


Tomorrow there may be no one left alive to tell the legend of the mask...so I will tell it here.

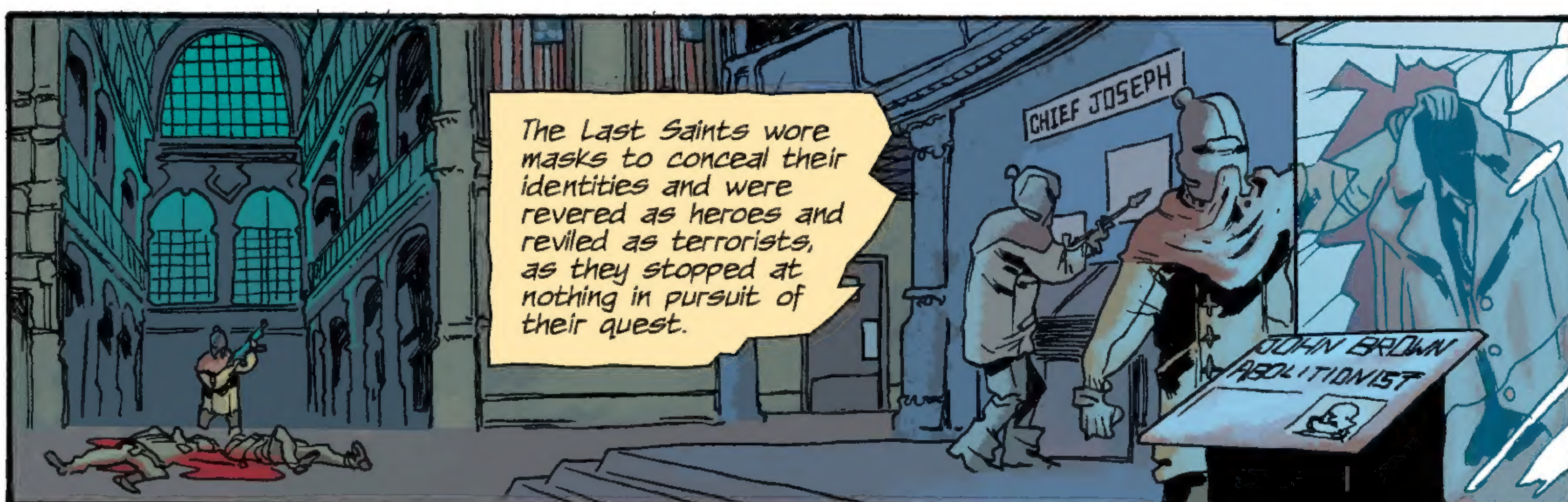
Centuries ago, as the floodwaters rose, a small group of liberation theologians recruited specialist warriors to send on a global mission.



And The Last Saints were born.



All but one perished in the flood, for they refused to take the barges.





As the raw tide
swallowed the land,
The Last Saints'
judgments were
harsh and unbending.



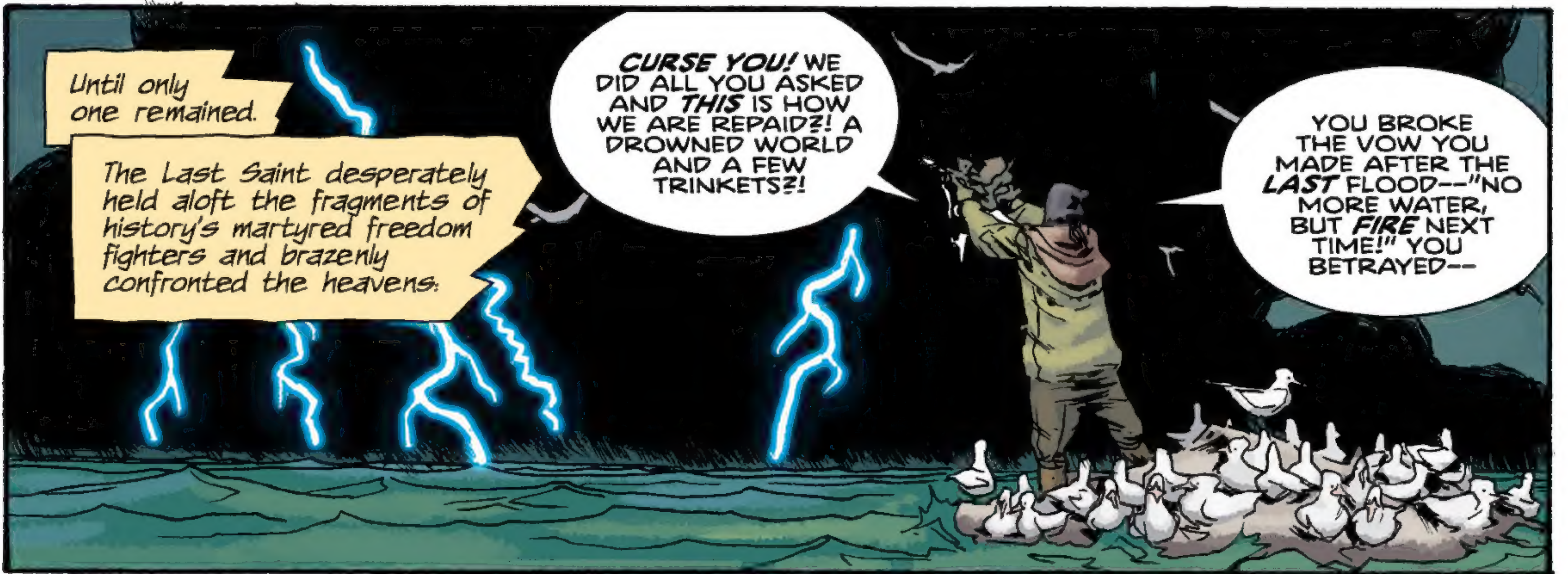
They were
protectors
of the poor
and dying.



They were
thieves and
liberators.



They were remorseless
avengers, unwavering in
their calling.



Until only
one remained.

The Last Saint desperately
held aloft the fragments of
history's martyred freedom
fighters and brazenly
confronted the heavens.

CURSE YOU! WE
DID ALL YOU ASKED
AND *THIS* IS HOW
WE ARE REPAYED?! A
DROWNED WORLD
AND A FEW
TRINKETS?!

YOU BROKE
THE VOW YOU
MADE AFTER THE
LAST FLOOD--"NO
MORE WATER,
BUT **FIRE** NEXT
TIME!" YOU
BETRAYED--

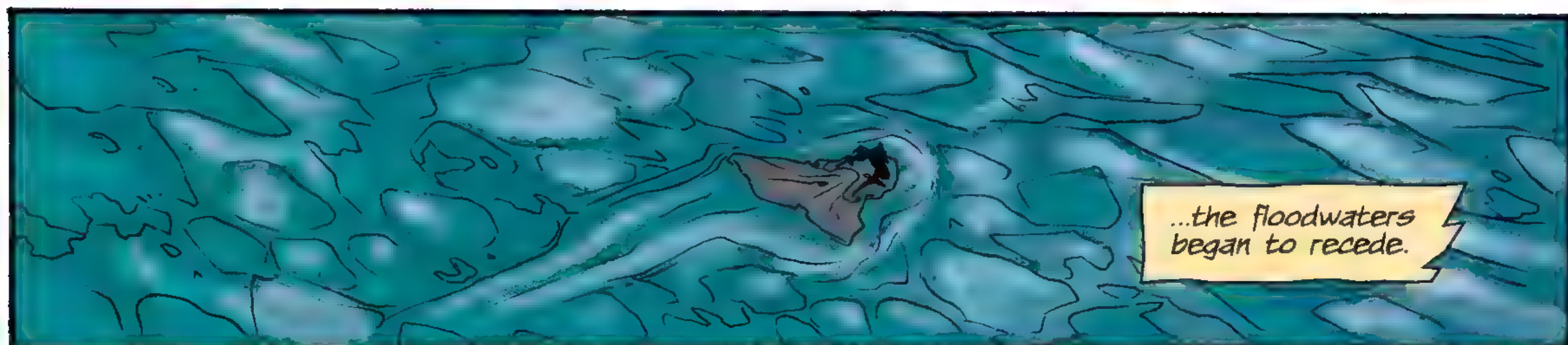


In that instant, the
essence of mankind's
struggle for justice--
both peaceful and
violent--was fused into
the charred mask.

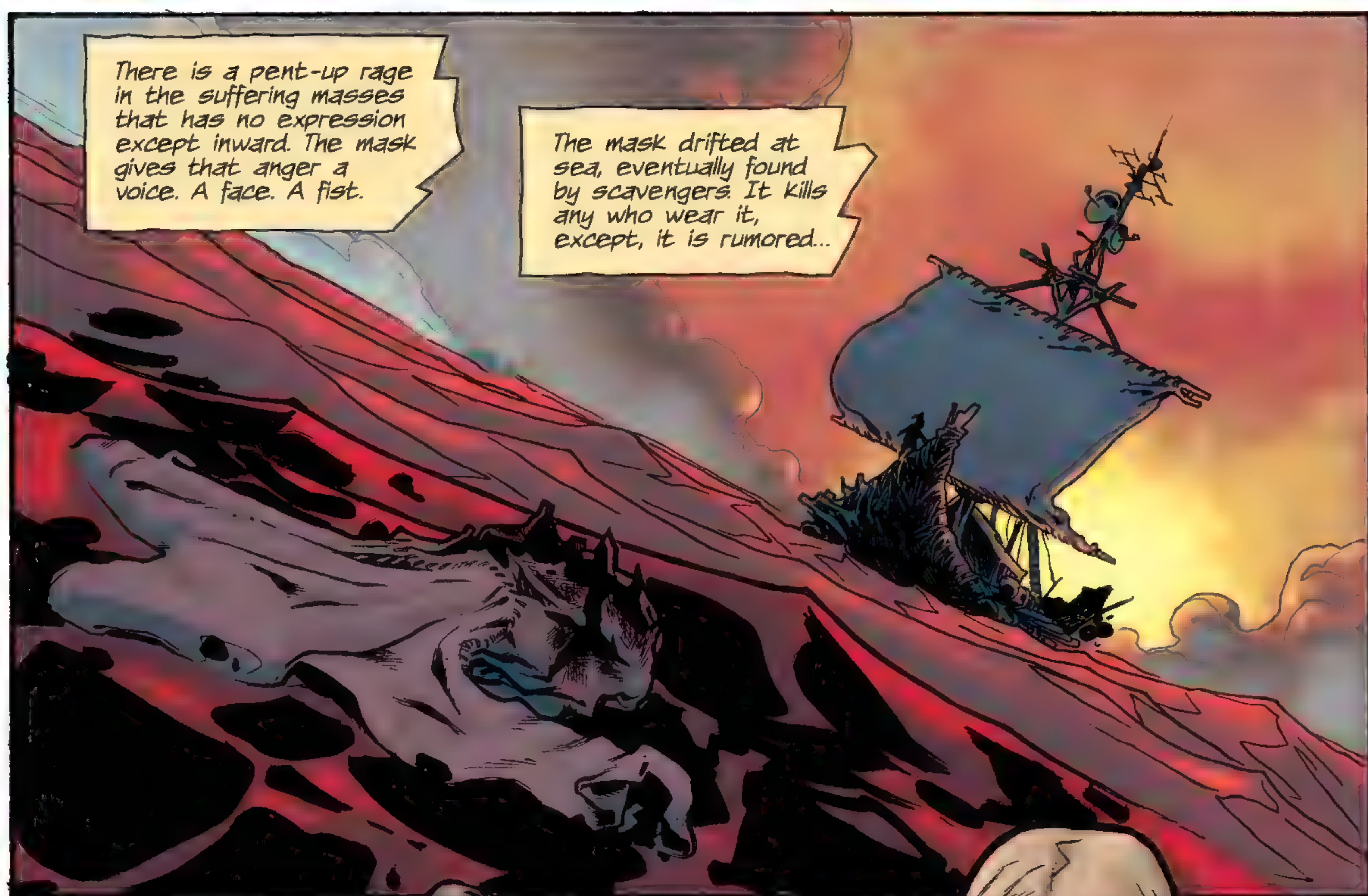




And with the sacrifice of the Last Saint...



...the floodwaters began to recede.



There is a pent-up rage in the suffering masses that has no expression except inward. The mask gives that anger a voice. A face. A fist.

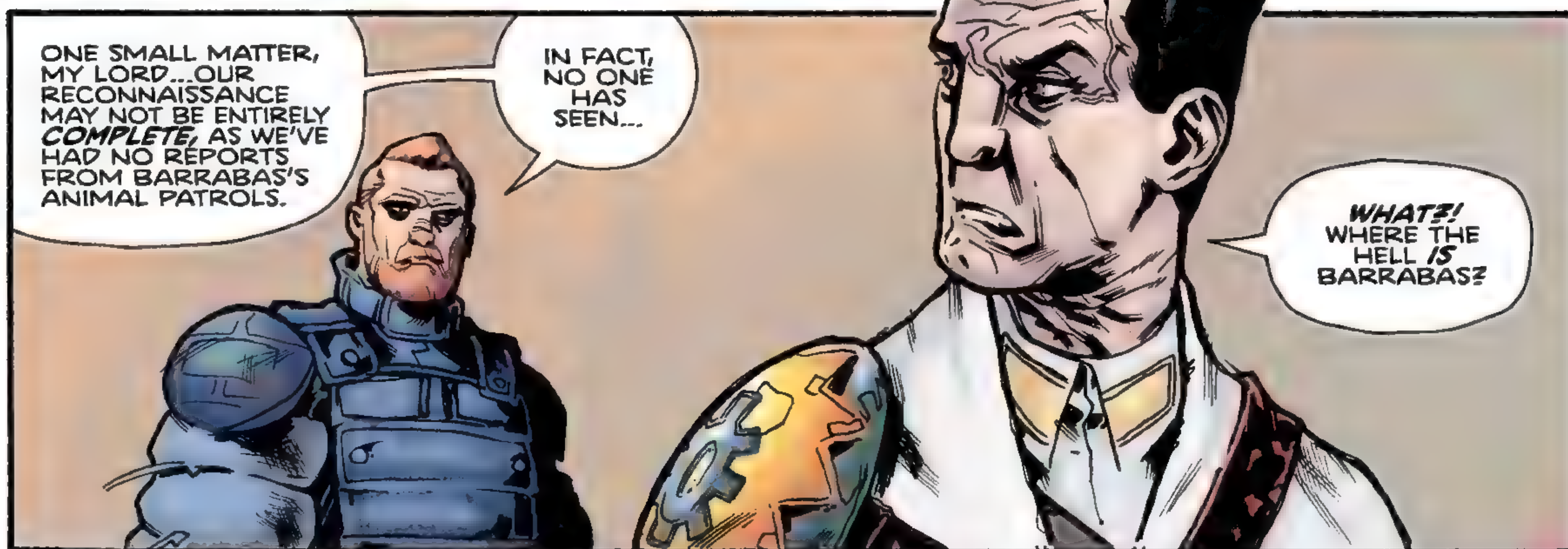
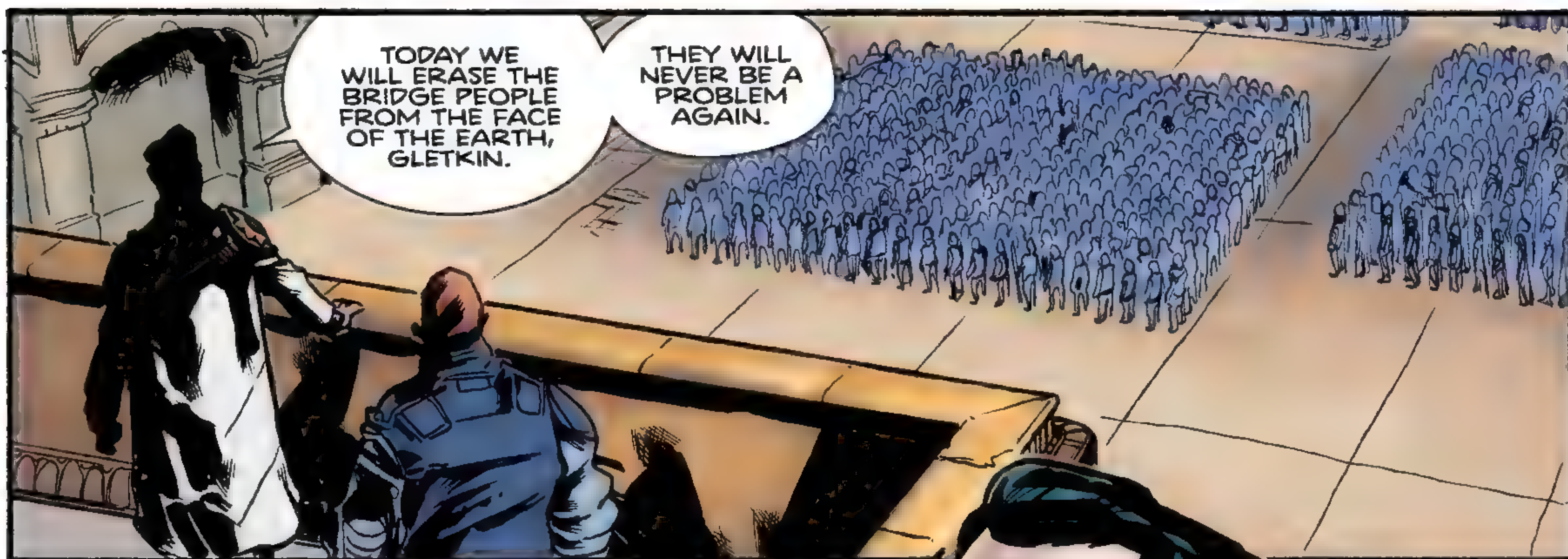
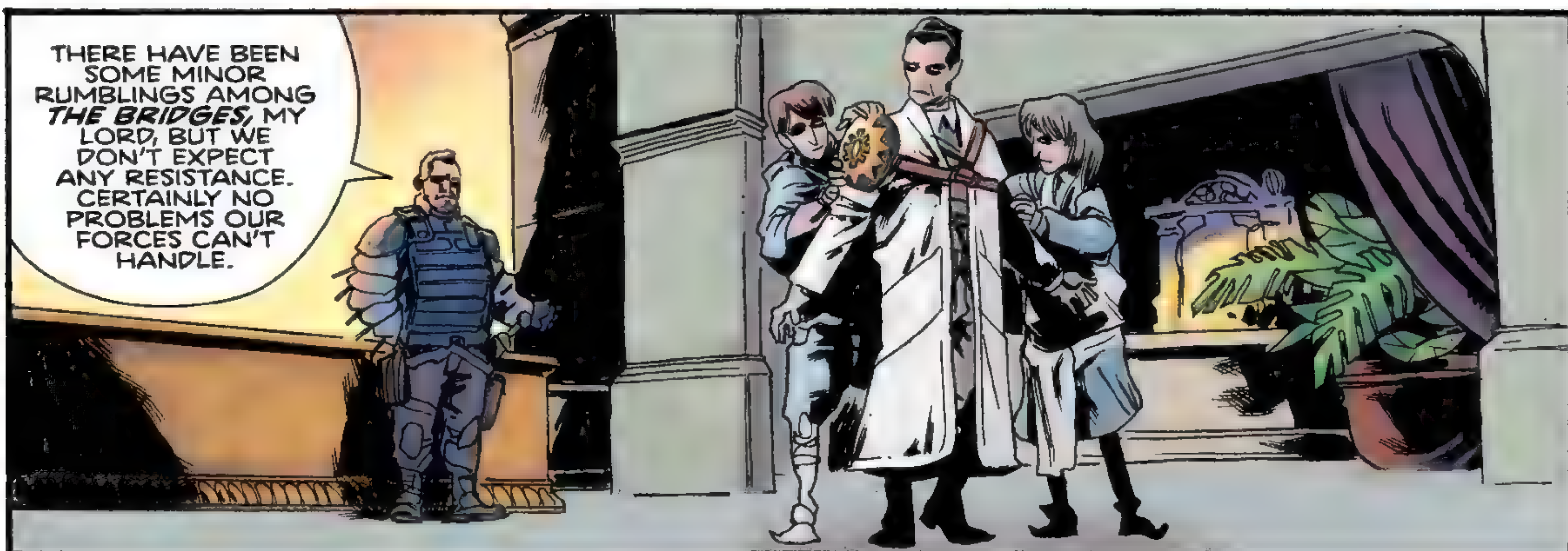
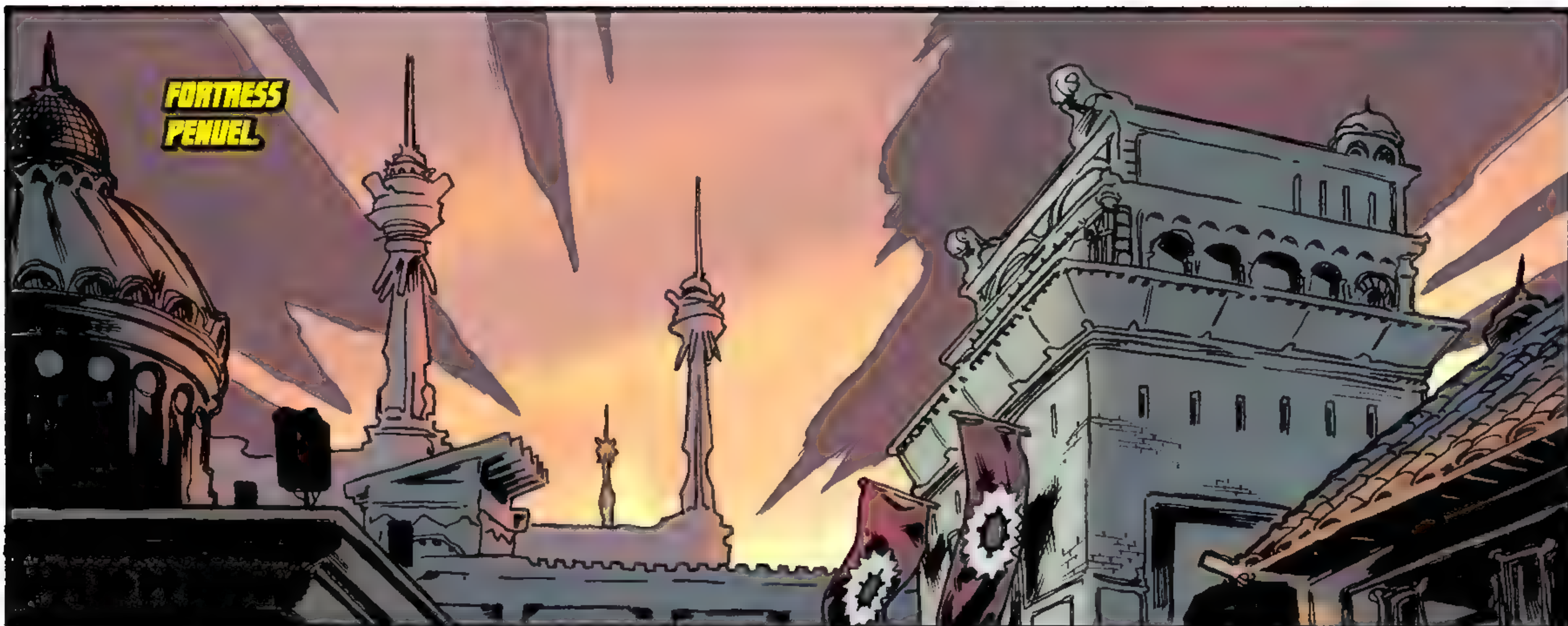
The mask drifted at sea, eventually found by scavengers. It kills any who wear it, except, it is rumored...

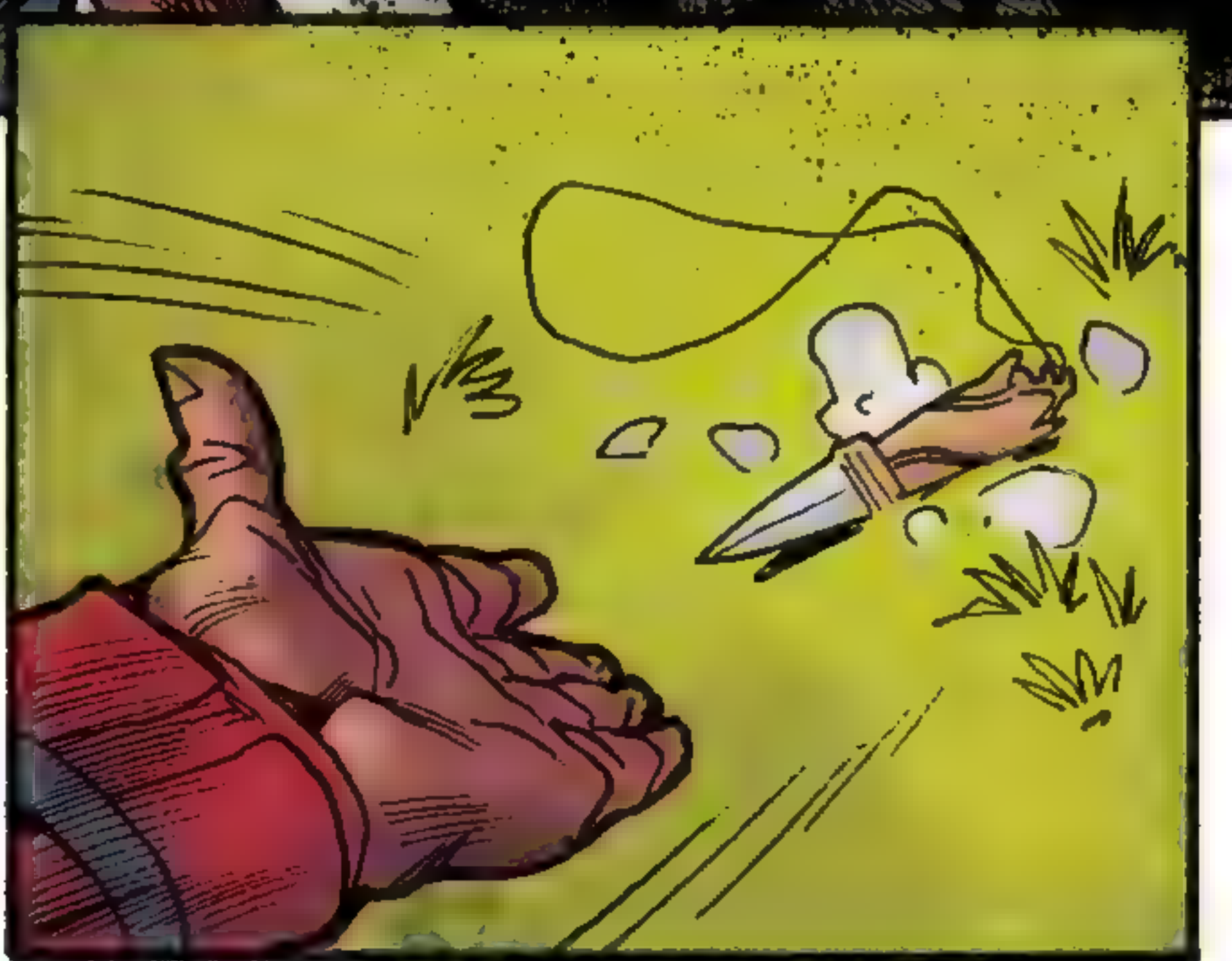
...a Saint.

IT'S TIME, SIMON. I JUST WANTED TO SAY GOODBYE. GOODBYE AND THANK YOU--

Oh, YOU'RE CERTAINLY NOT GOING ANYWHERE WITHOUT ME. WHO WOULD GET YOU OUT OF TROUBLE?







DEAR
GOD...
THERE'S NO
END TO
THEM!

...WOLFE'S ARMY IS *HUGE*.
MORE THAN *TWICE* AS MANY
AS WE FEARED.

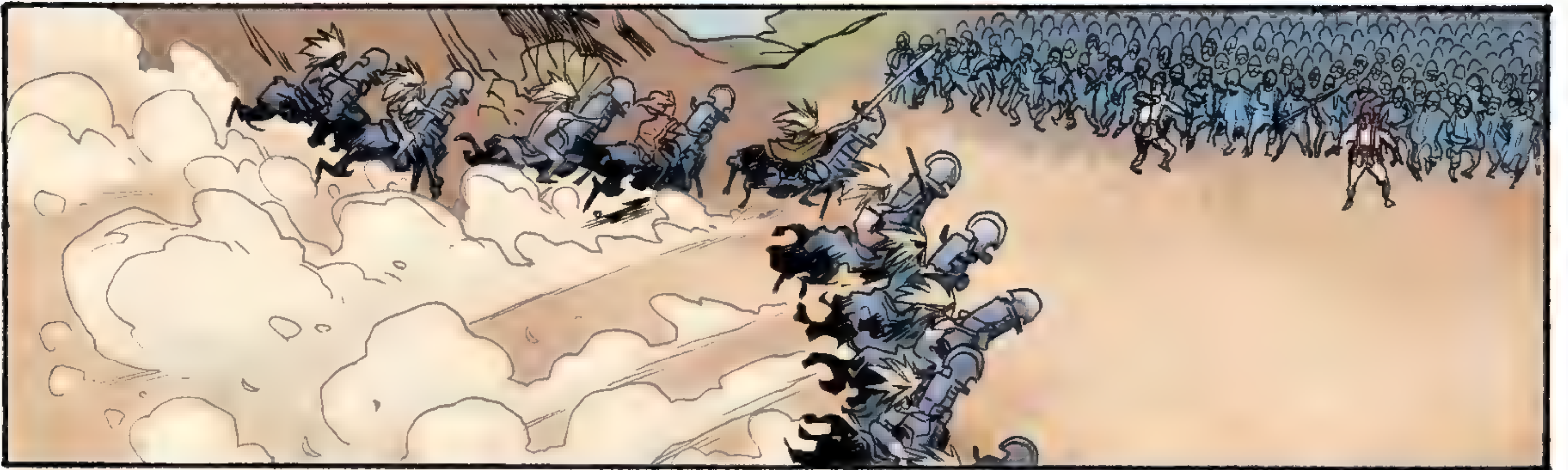
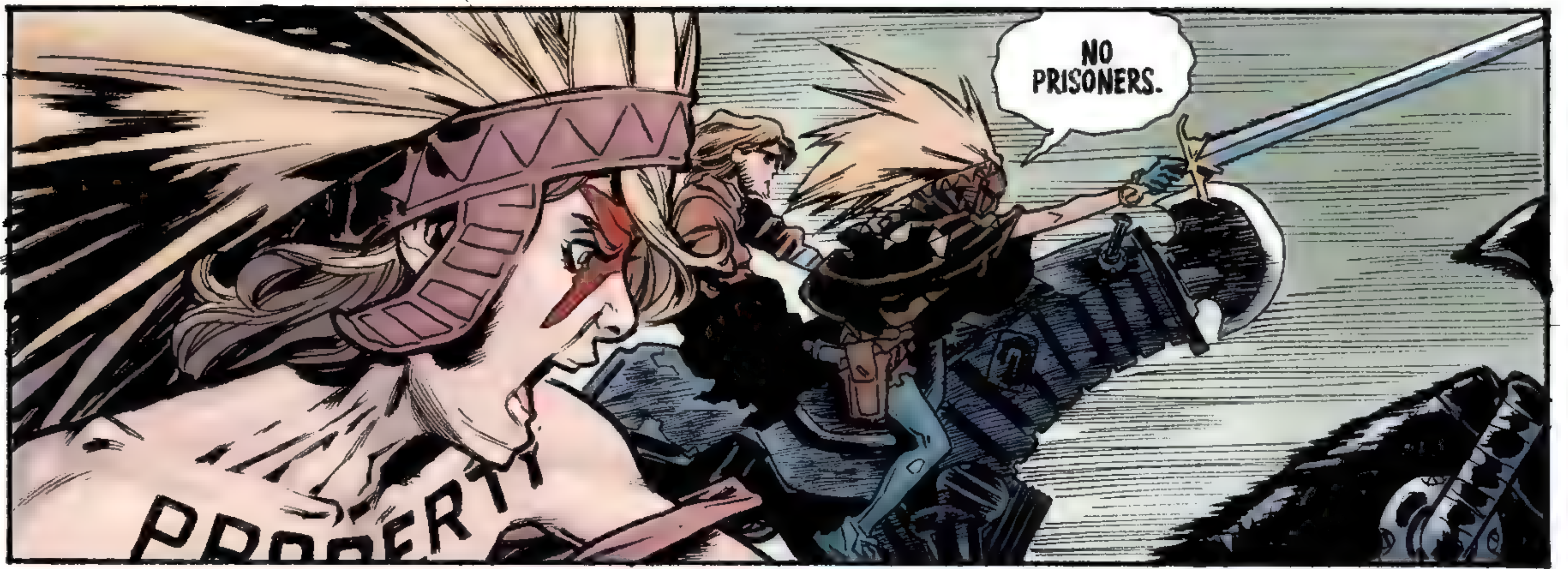
ALL THE
CADRES ARE
IN POSITION,
ANZIO.

HOLD...

CAPTAIN
E'LEE? WHAT'S
THIS, SIR...?

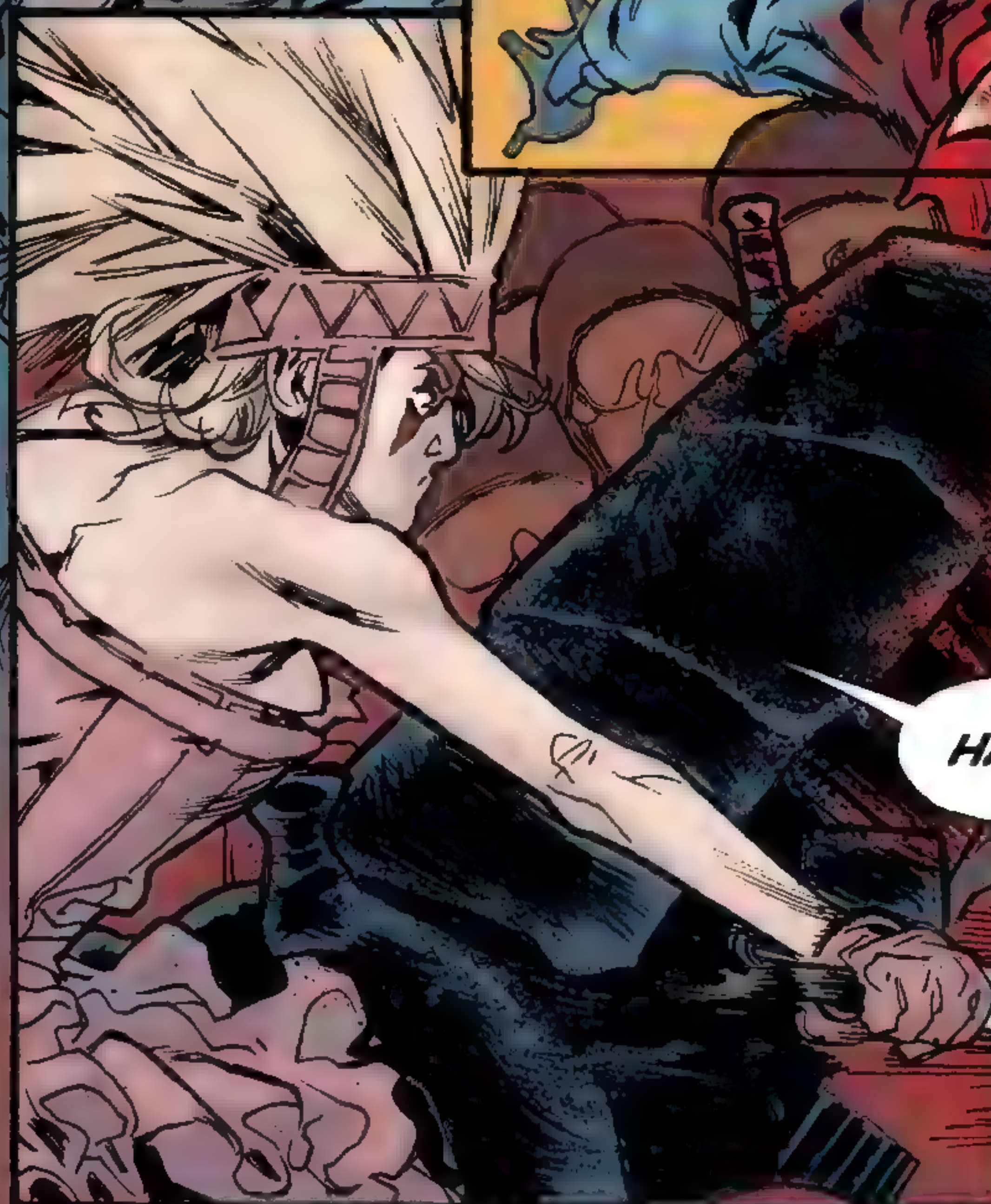
Oh...IT'S LIKELY
AN ATTEMPT TO PARLAY.
OR ~~SHAH~~ PERHAPS,
THE FOOLS ARE TRYING
TO SURRENDER.



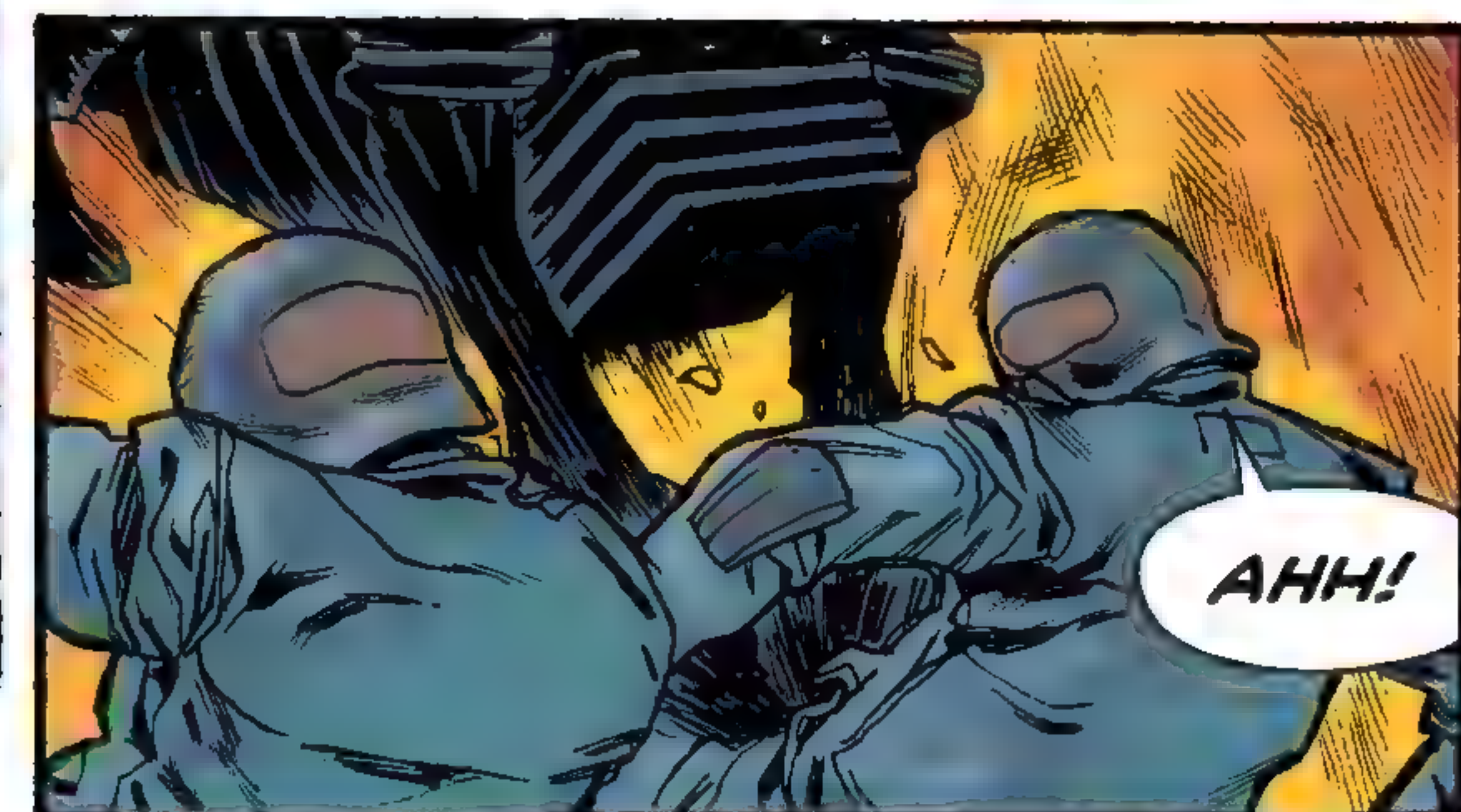
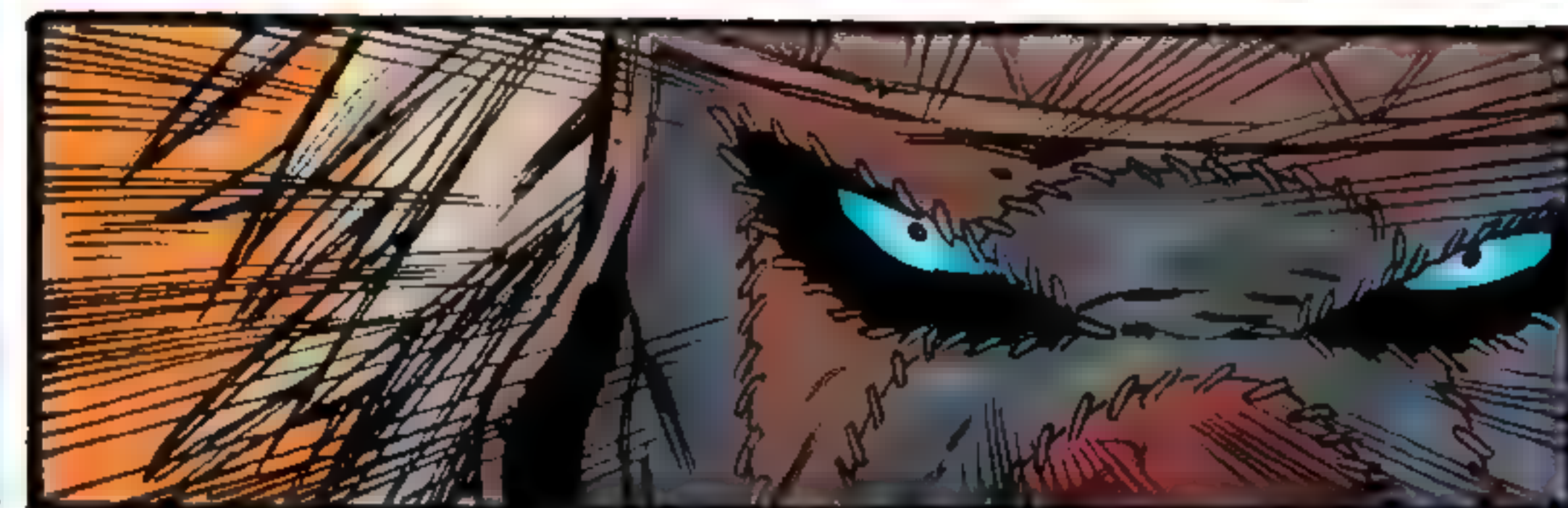


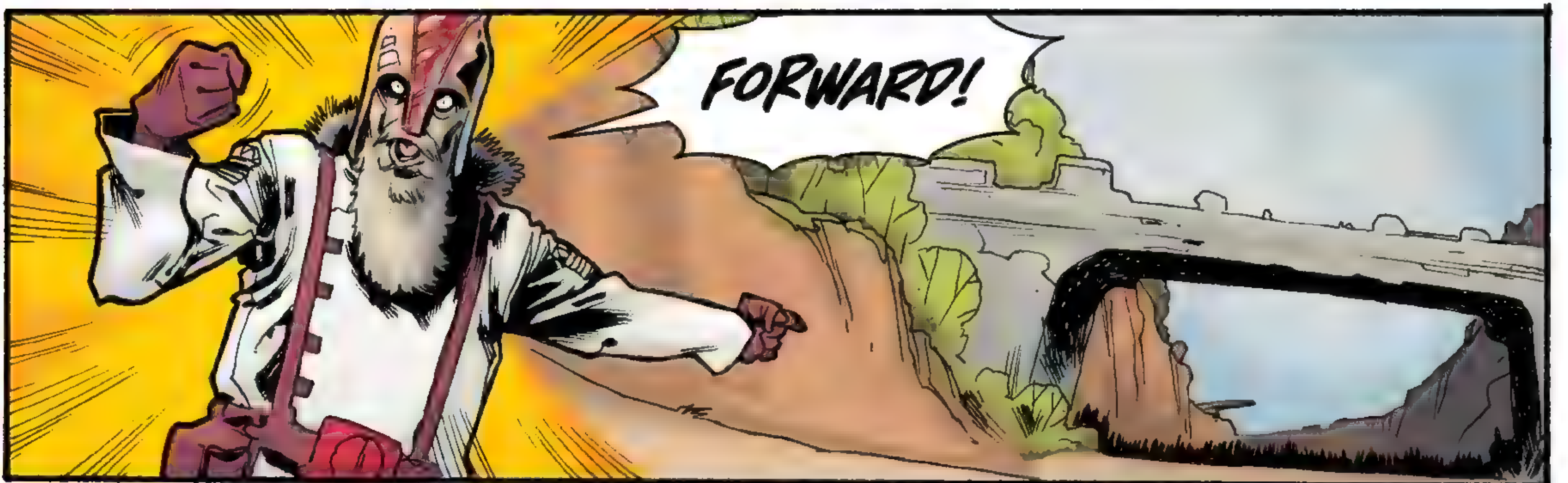
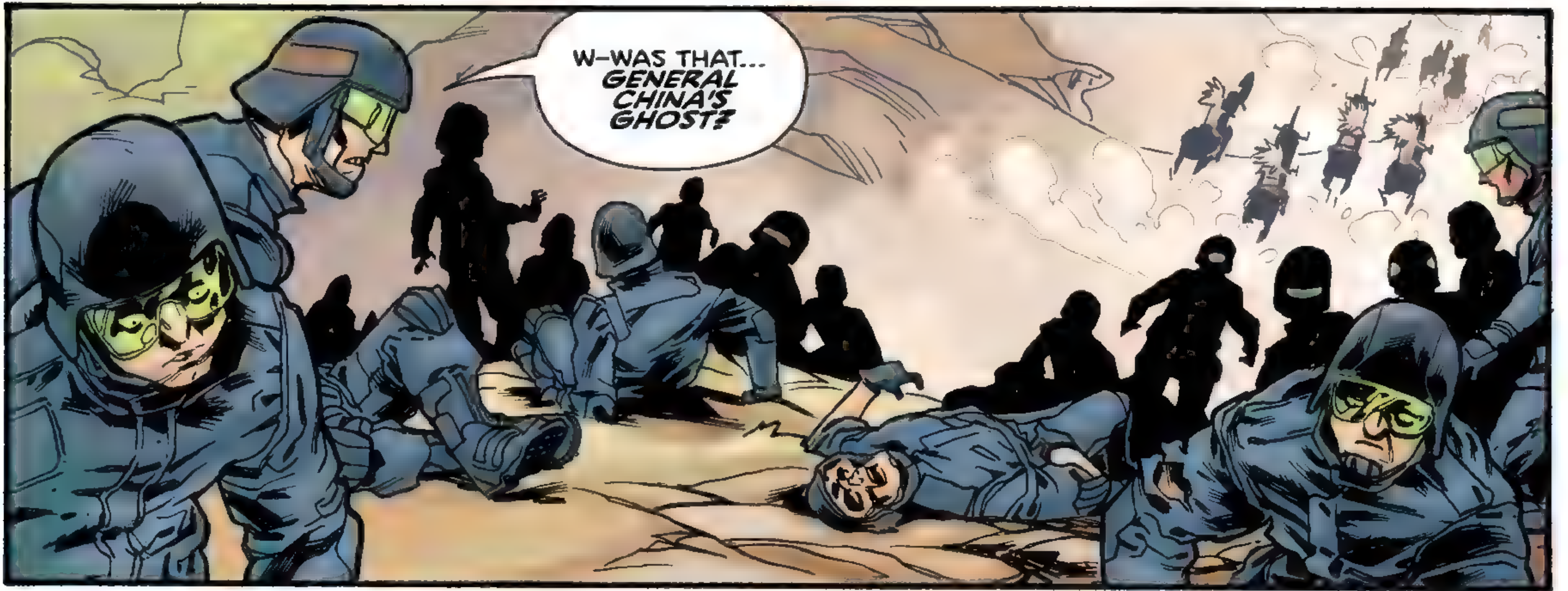


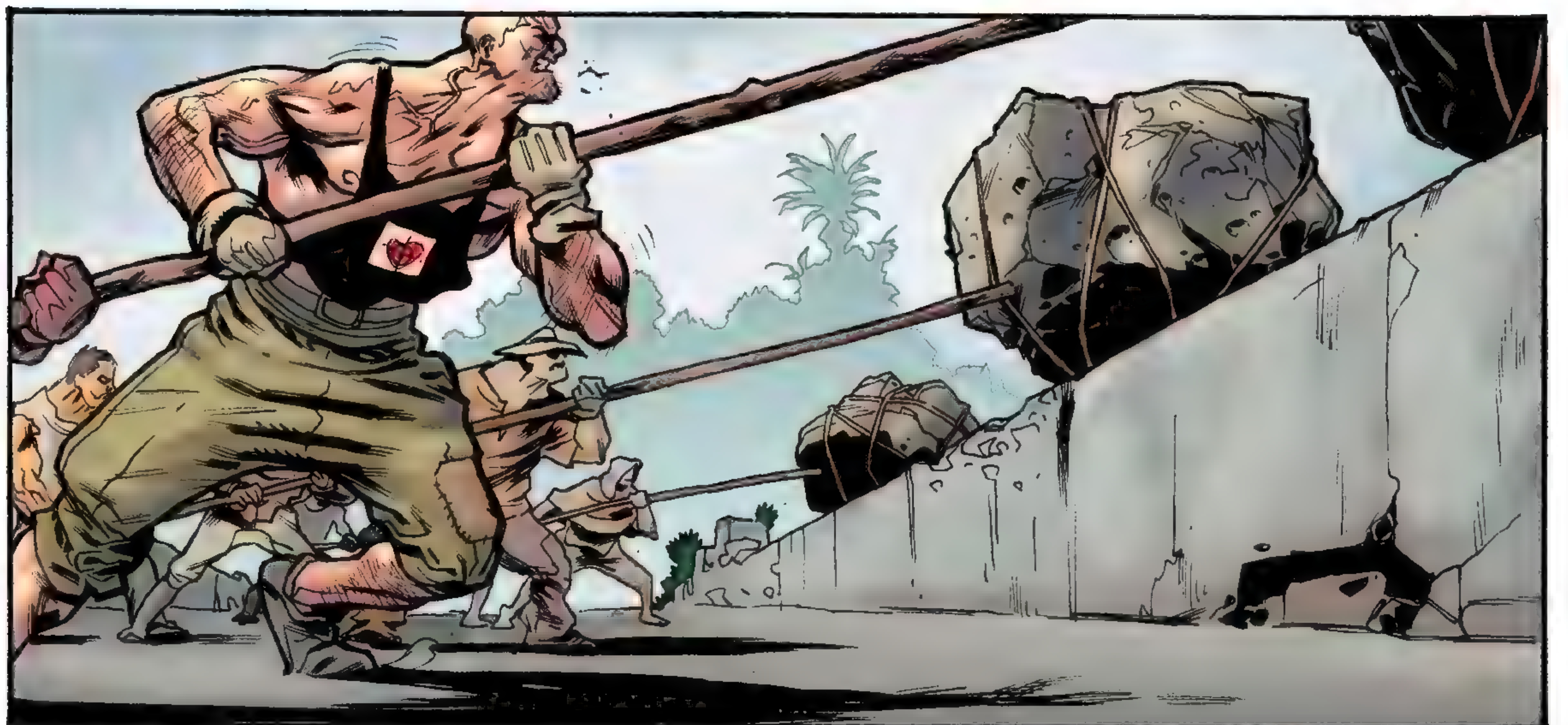
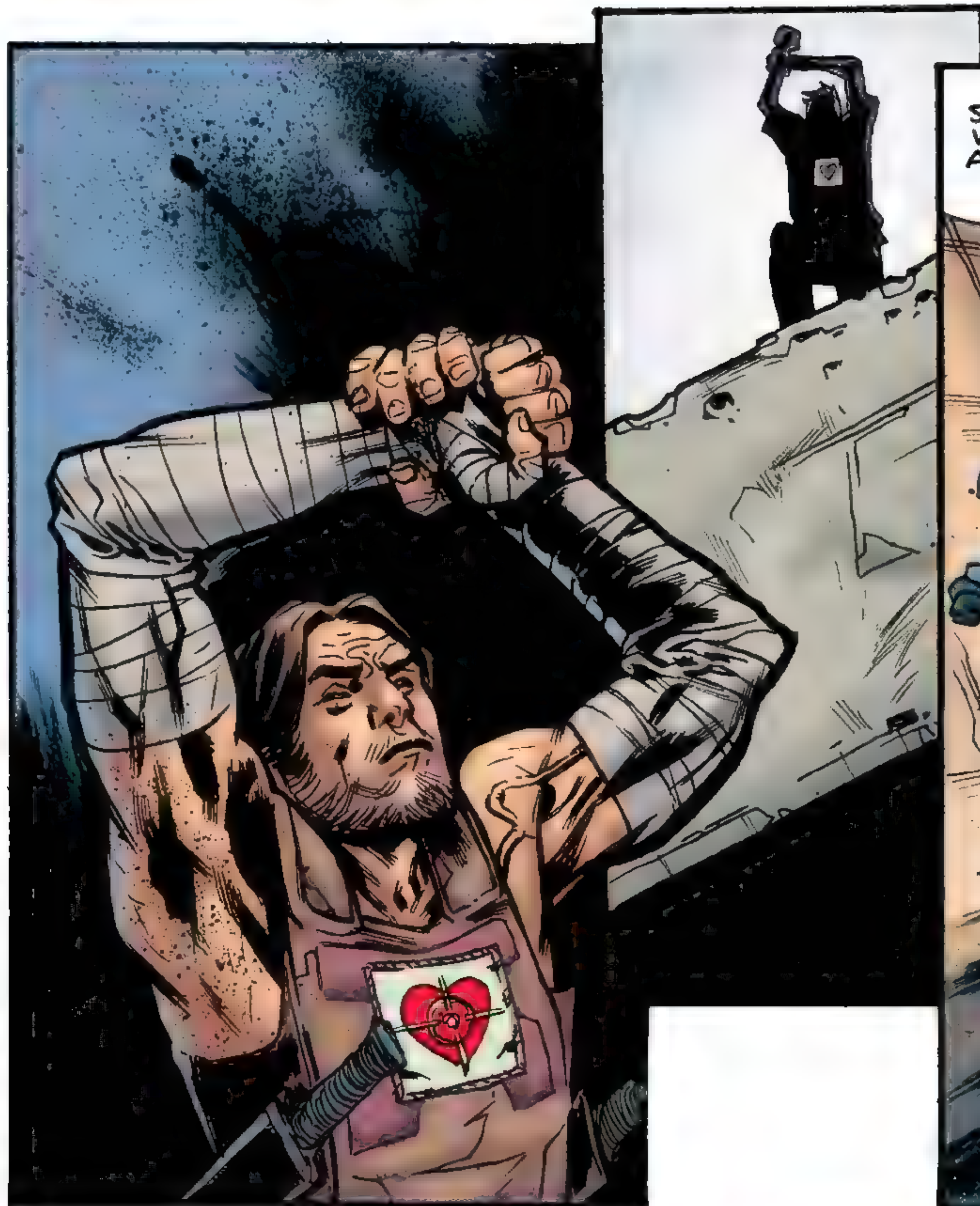
UGH!

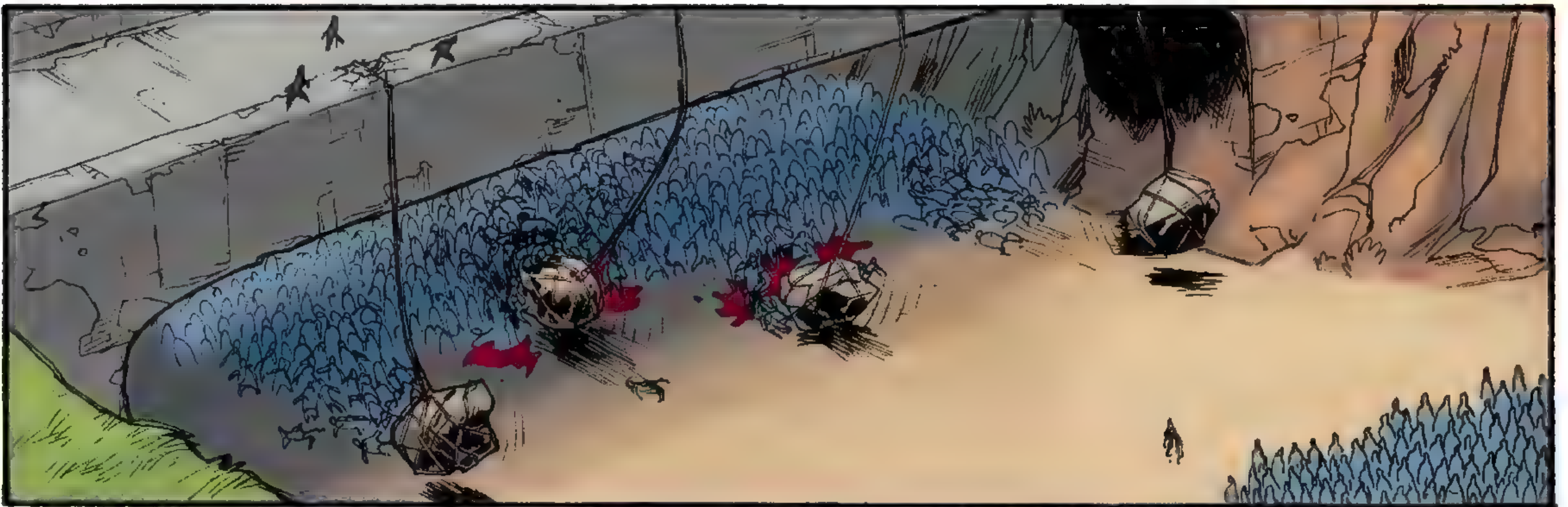
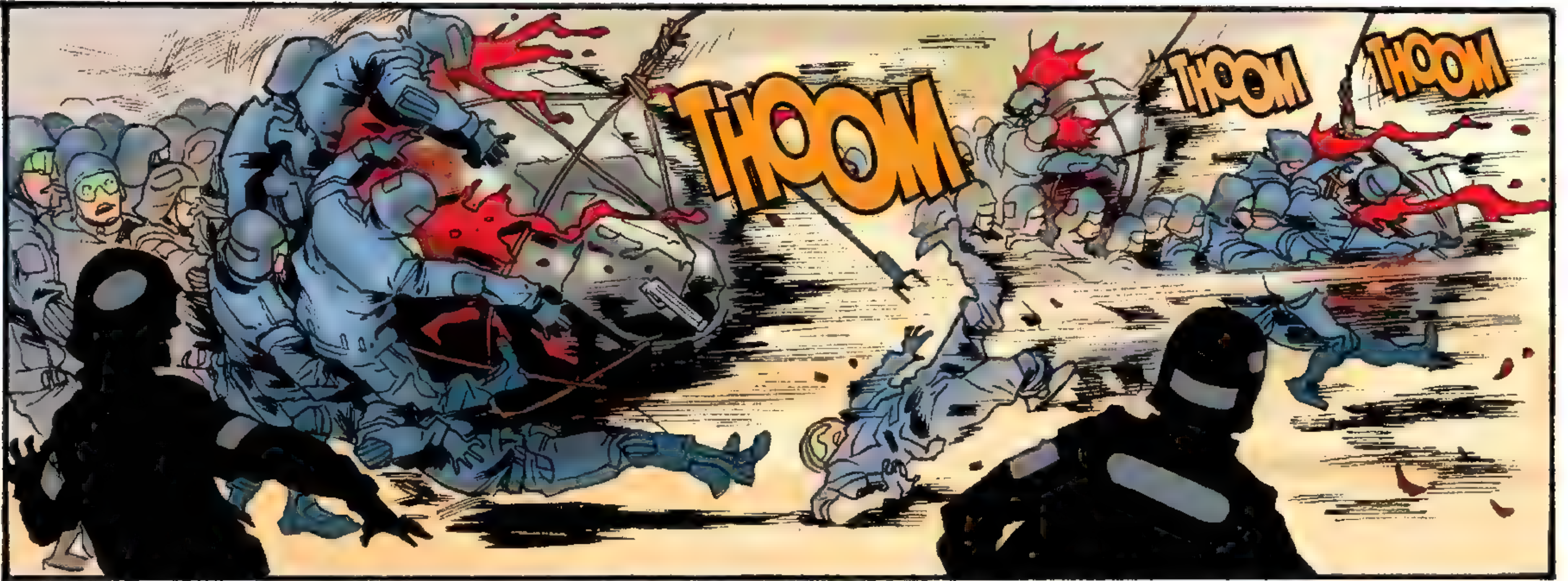
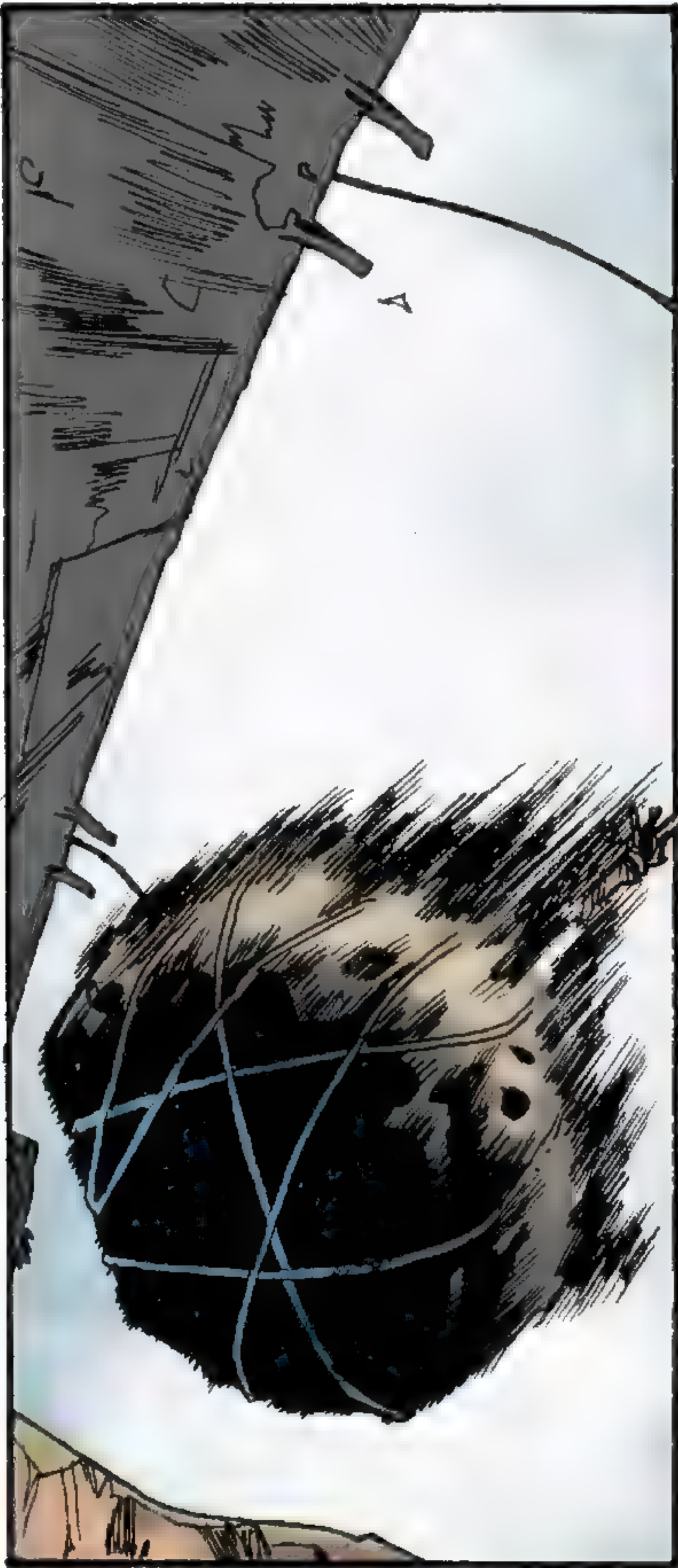
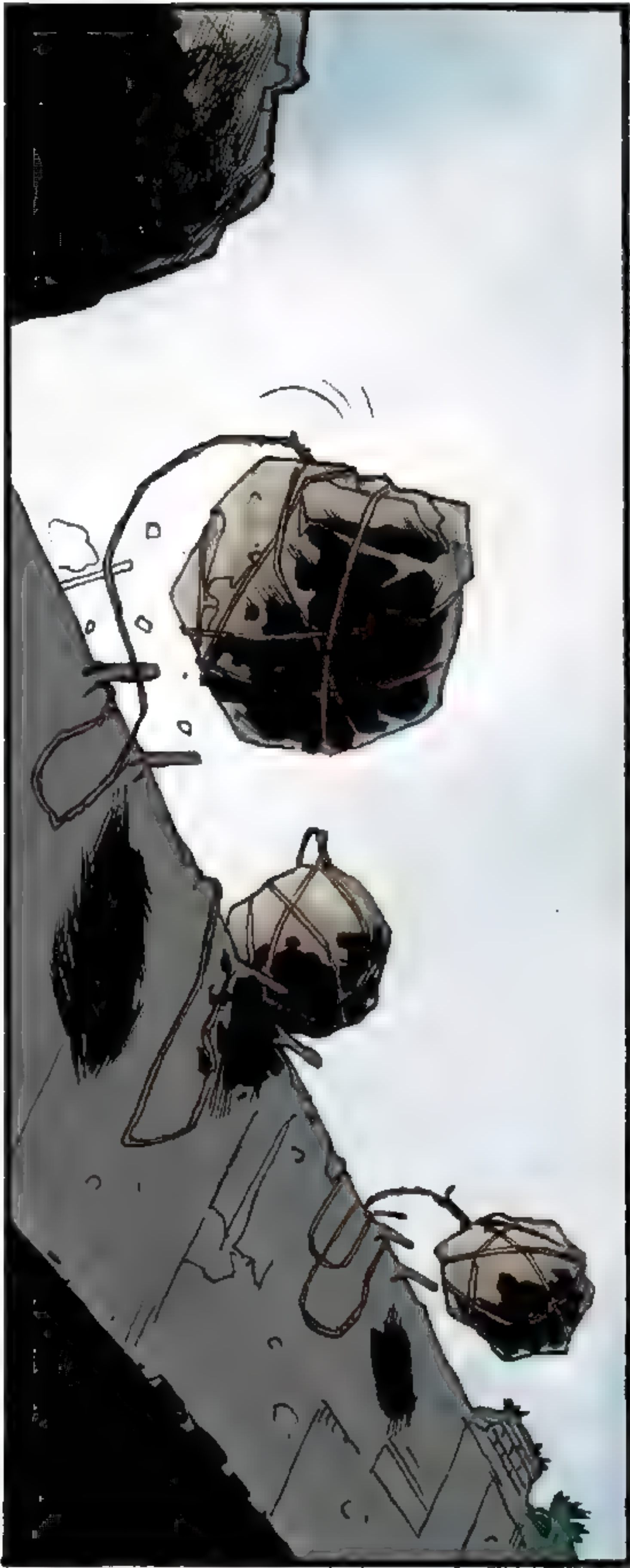


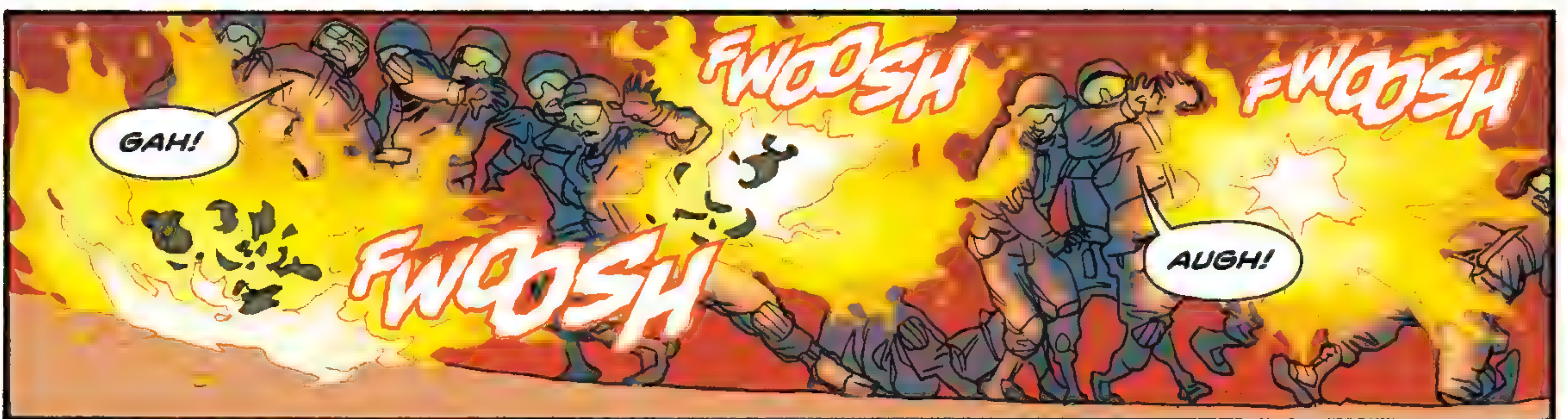
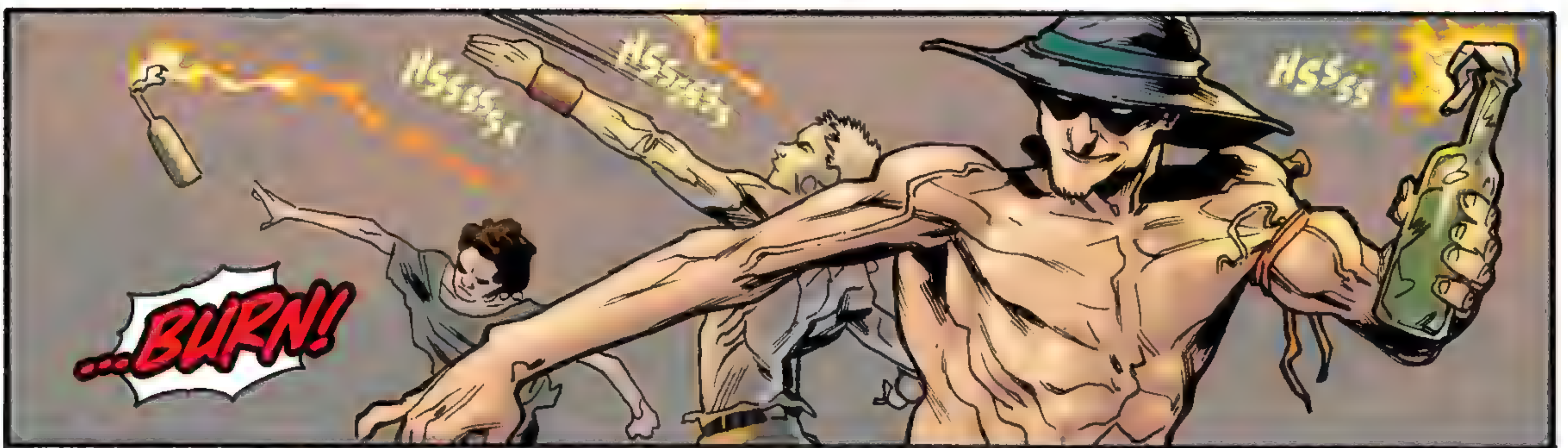
HAH!

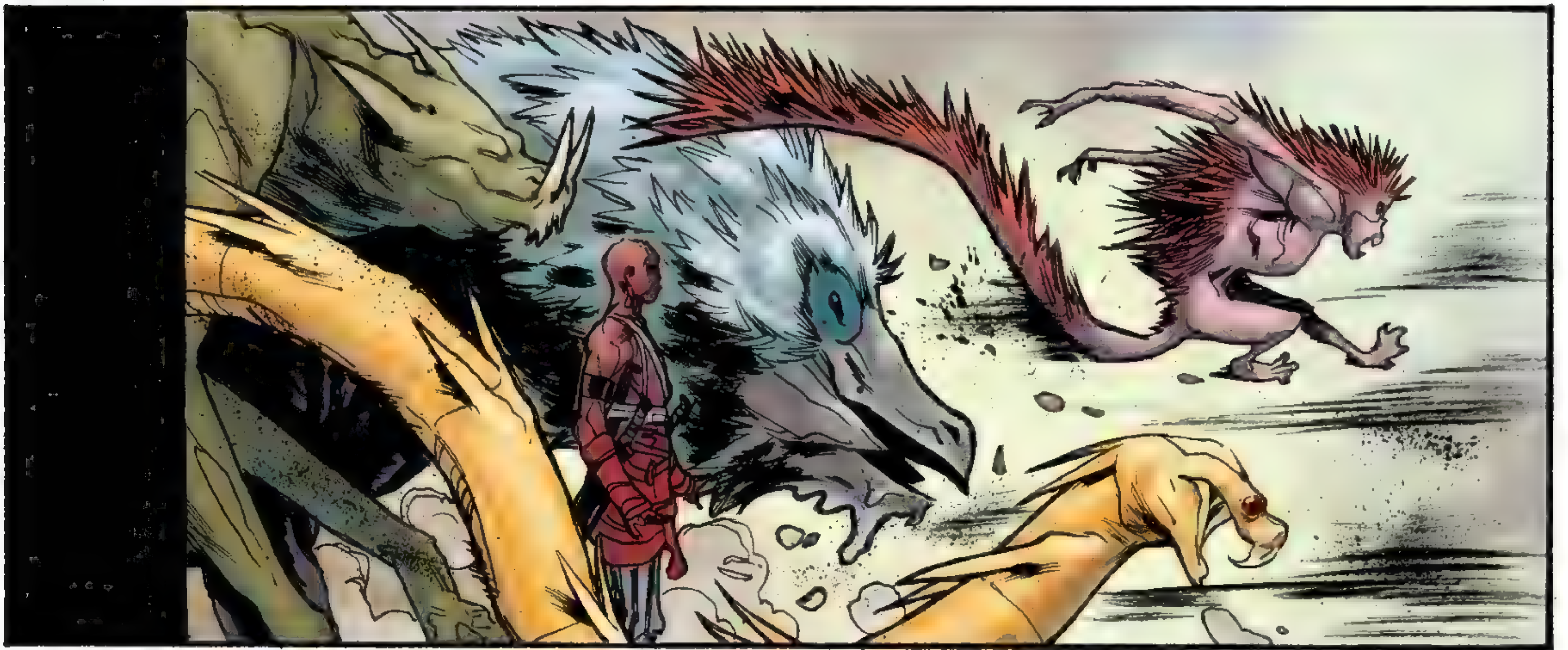




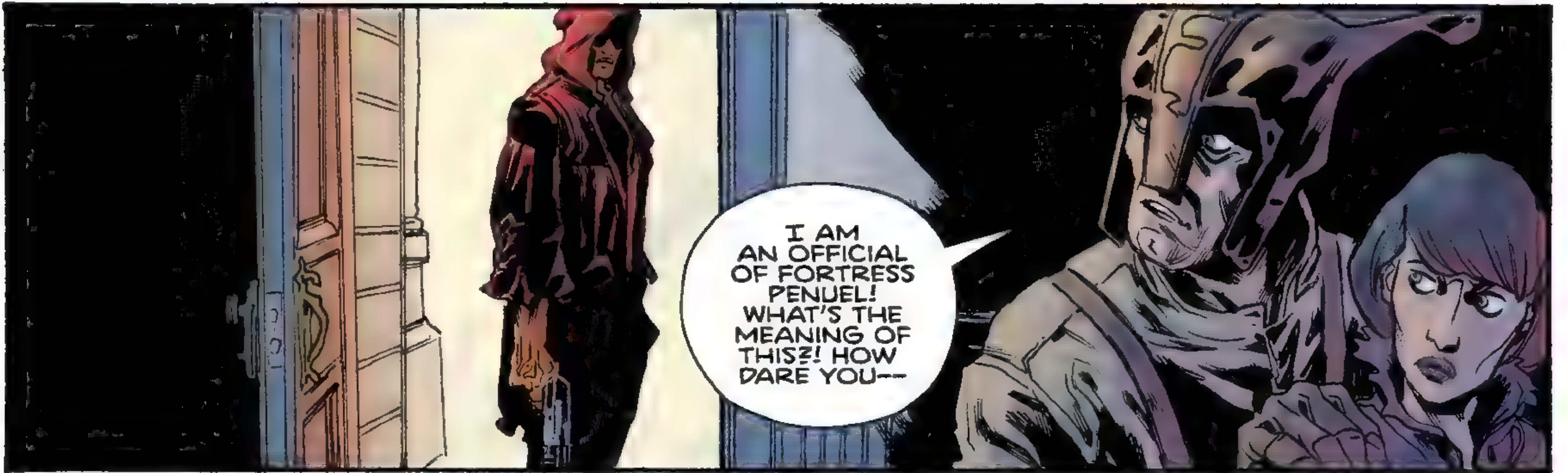






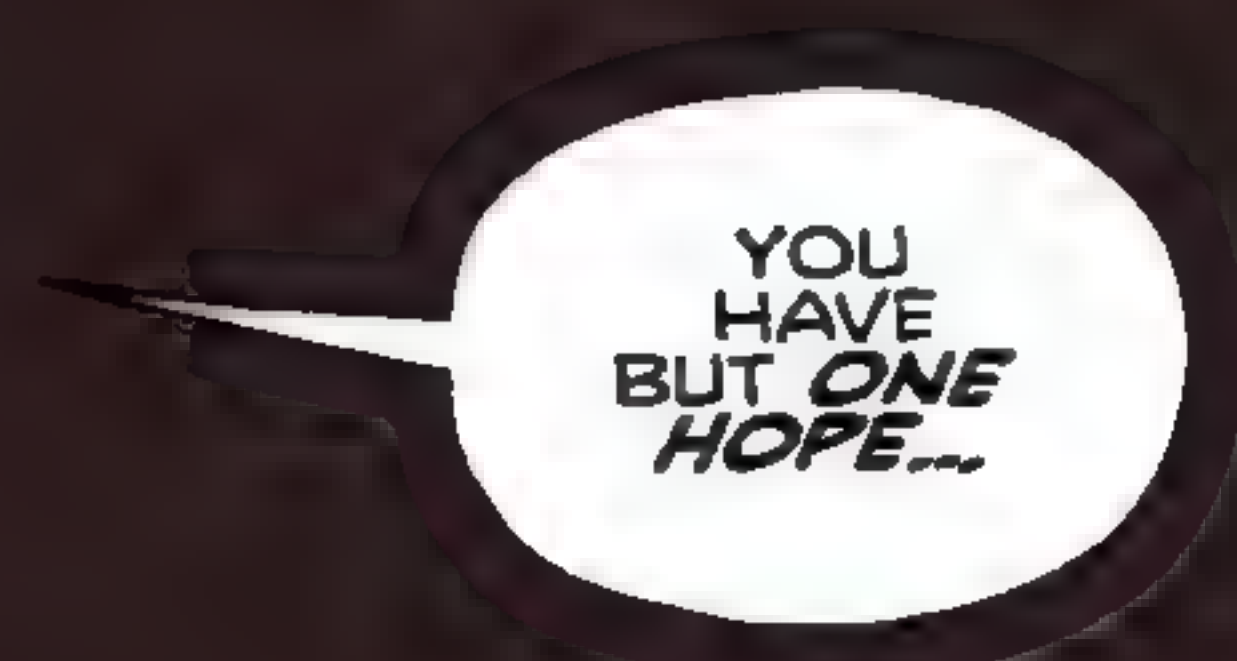









THE NIGHT BEFORE.






WHATEVER LITTLE TRICKS
YOU HAVE PLANNED,
REMEMBER--**NOTHING** CAN
SAVE THE BRIDGE PEOPLE.
BUT THERE **MAY** BE AN
OPENING TO GET TO TOMO
WOLFE. WHILE WOLFE'S
ATTENTION IS FOCUSED
ON THE BRIDGES, ORCHID
MUST TAKE HER CHANCE
TO DESTROY HIM.

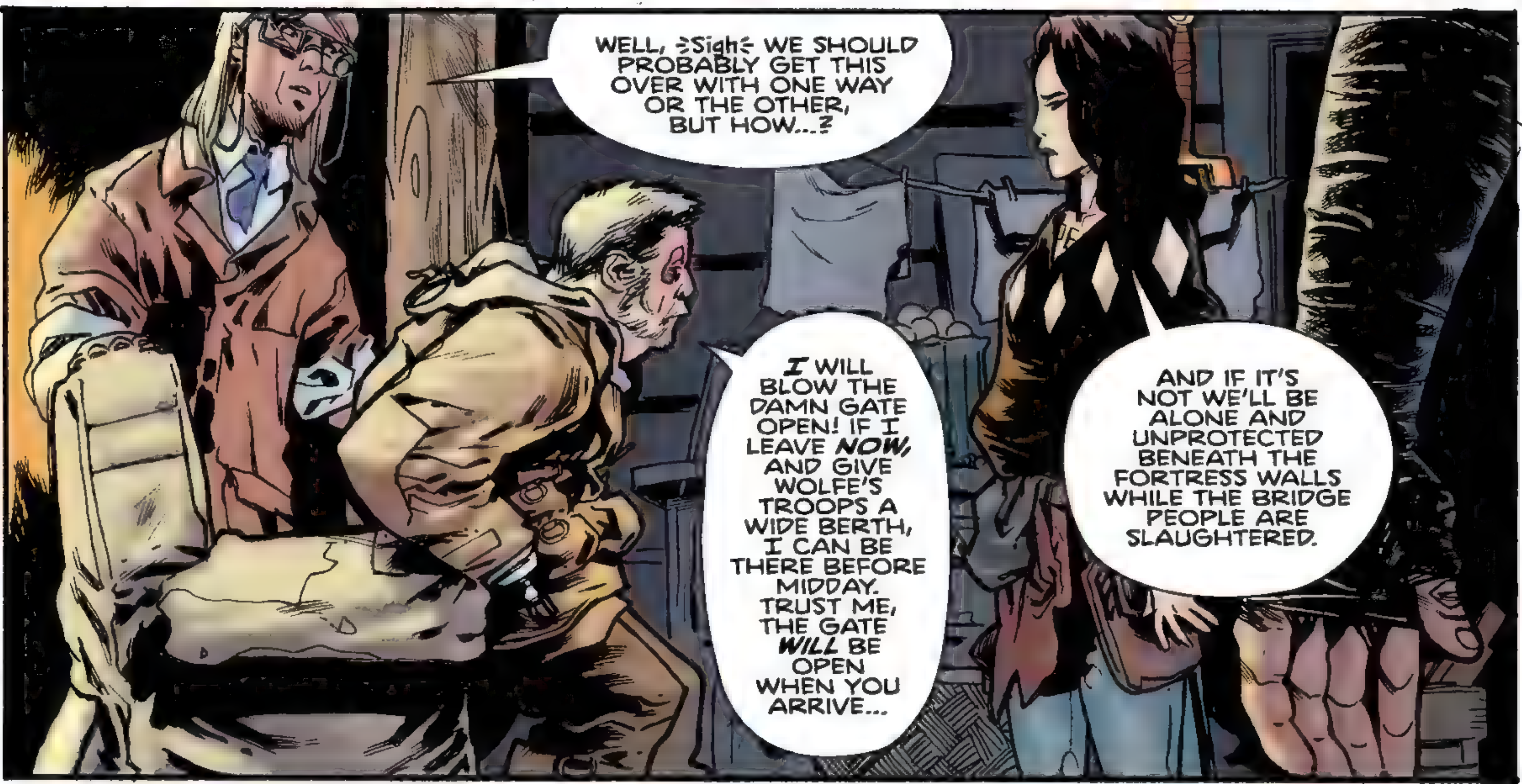
WE WILL
DO WHATEVER
IT TAKES TO BUY
HER AS MUCH
TIME AS
POSSIBLE.

BUT THEY'LL
HAVE TRIPLED THE
GUARD ON FORTRESS
PENUEL! THERE'S
NO WAY **IN!**



THERE **IS** A
WAY. I'VE SEEN IT.
IT'S CALLED THE
PENITENT'S GATEWAY,
AN ENTRANCE TO THE
FORTRESS LONG
SEALED SHUT. DIFFICULT
TO REACH, BUT IT
WILL LIKELY BE
UNDEFENDED.

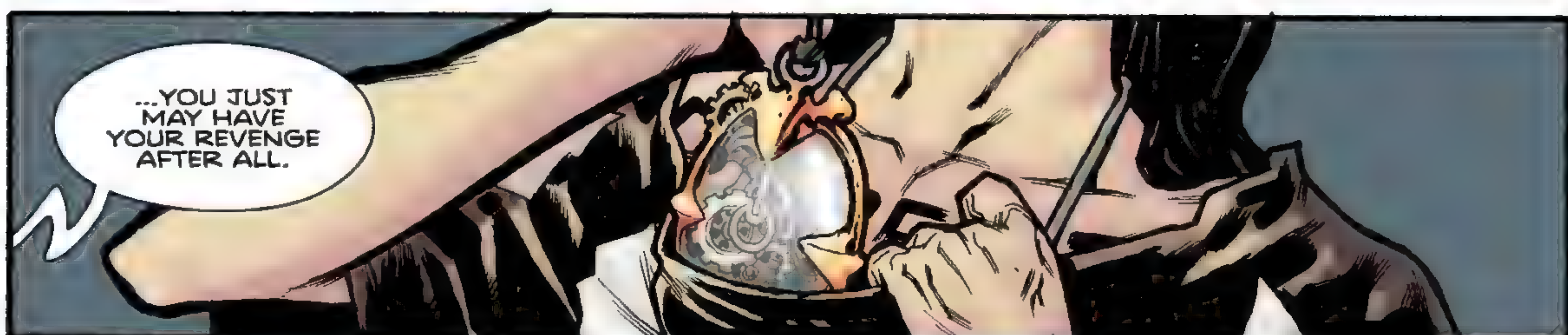
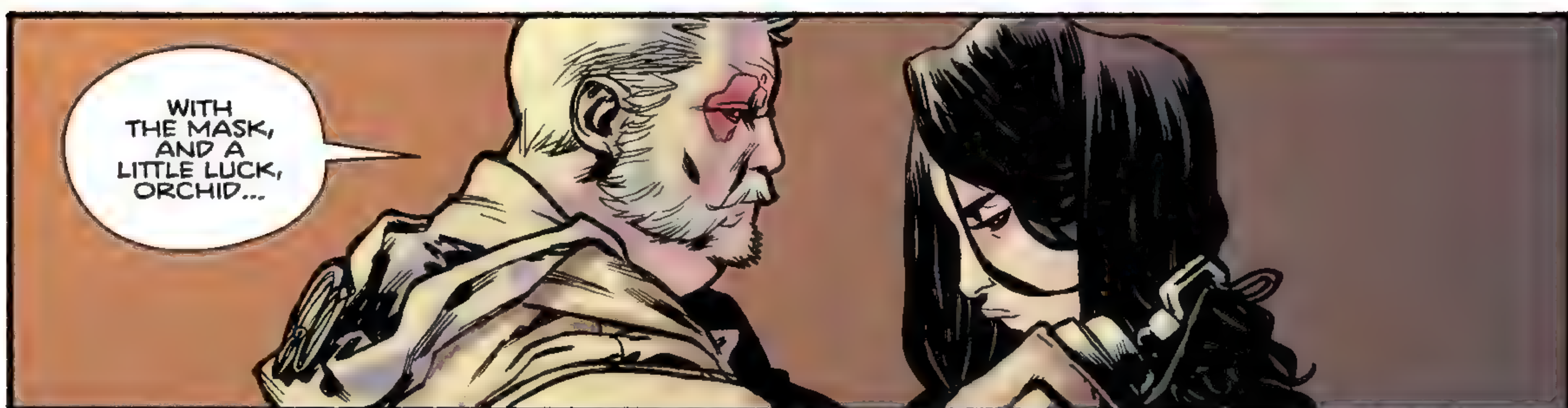
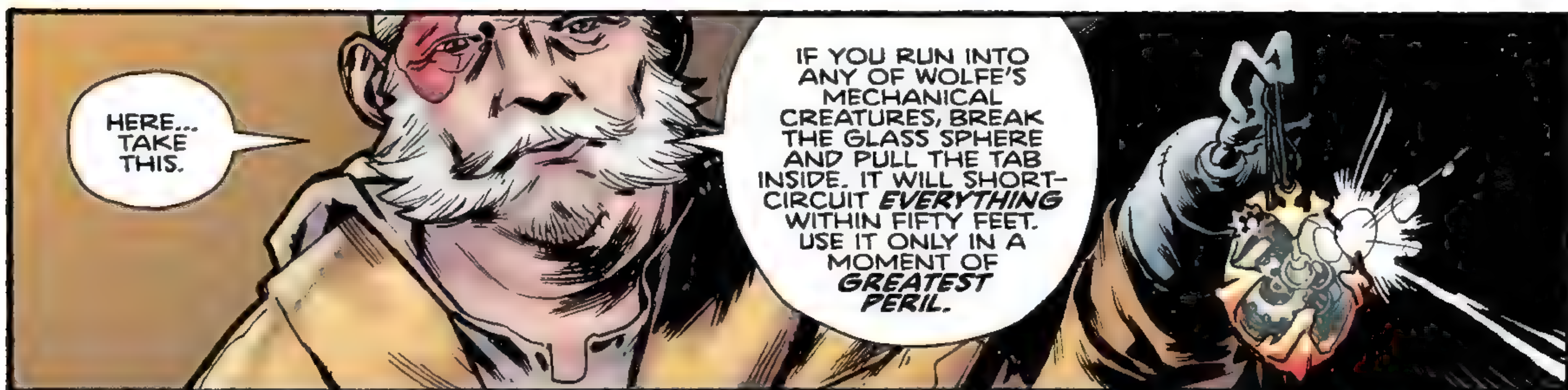
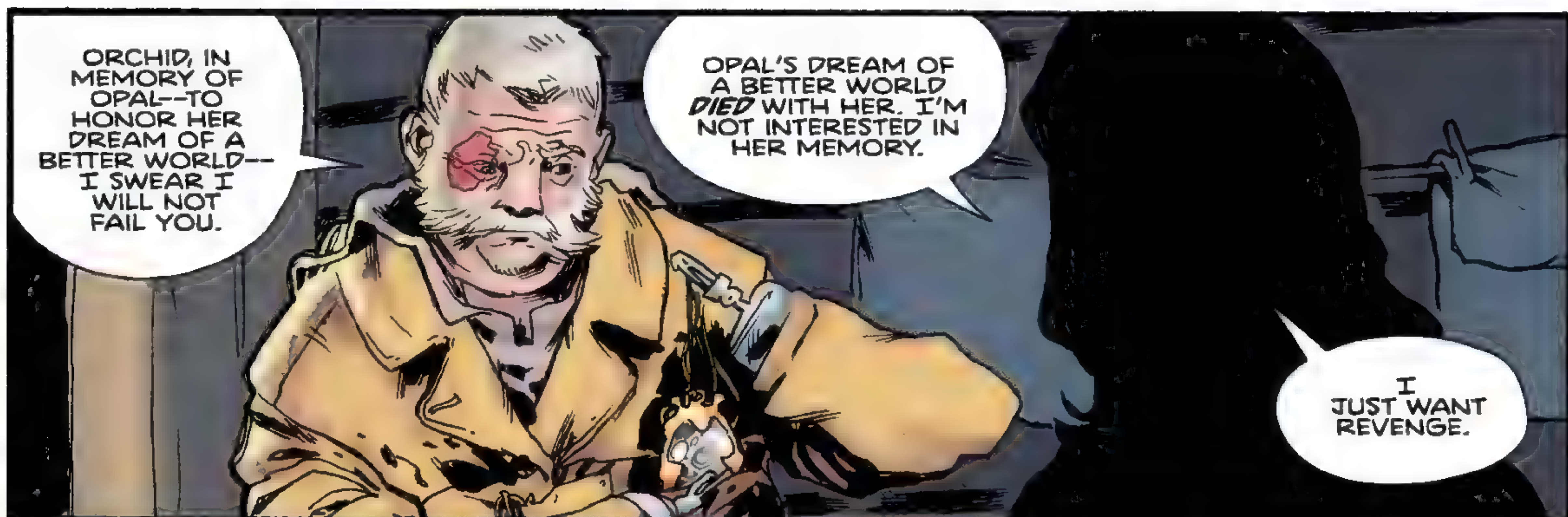
IF
IT COULD
BE BREACHED...
YOU'D HAVE
DIRECT ACCESS
TO WOLFE
HIMSELF.



WELL, ~~Sight~~ WE SHOULD
PROBABLY GET THIS
OVER WITH ONE WAY
OR THE OTHER,
BUT HOW...?

I WILL
BLOW THE
DAMN GATE
OPEN! IF I
LEAVE **NOW**,
AND GIVE
WOLFE'S
TROOPS A
WIDE BERTH,
I CAN BE
THERE BEFORE
MIDDAY.
TRUST ME,
THE GATE
WILL BE
OPEN
WHEN YOU
ARRIVE...

AND IF IT'S
NOT WE'LL BE
ALONE AND
UNPROTECTED
BENEATH THE
FORTRESS WALLS
WHILE THE BRIDGE
PEOPLE ARE
SLAUGHTERED.





AND
WESTIN
HAS FAILED
US.







SHADOW
REBELS...
**FALL
BACK!**



WE
WON'T LAST
MUCH
LONGER.

I PRAY
ORCHID HAS
KILLED TOMO
WOLFE!



**THE PENITENT'S
GATEWAY.**

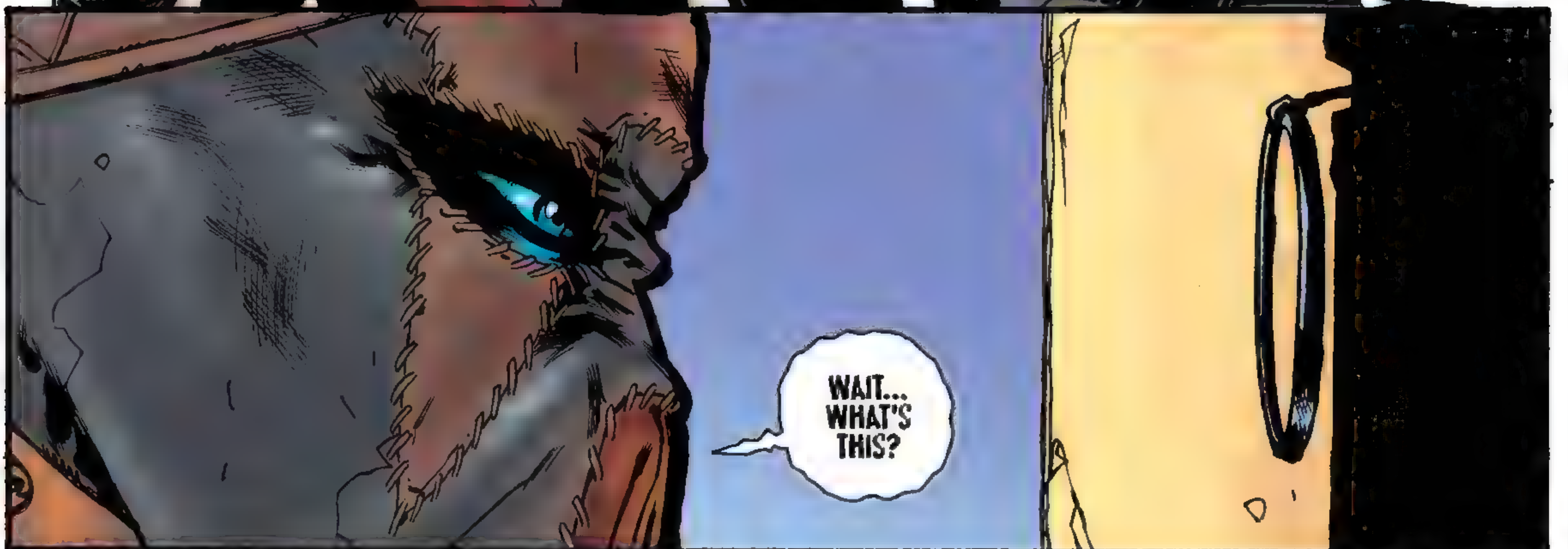


THERE'S
NO WAY
IN.

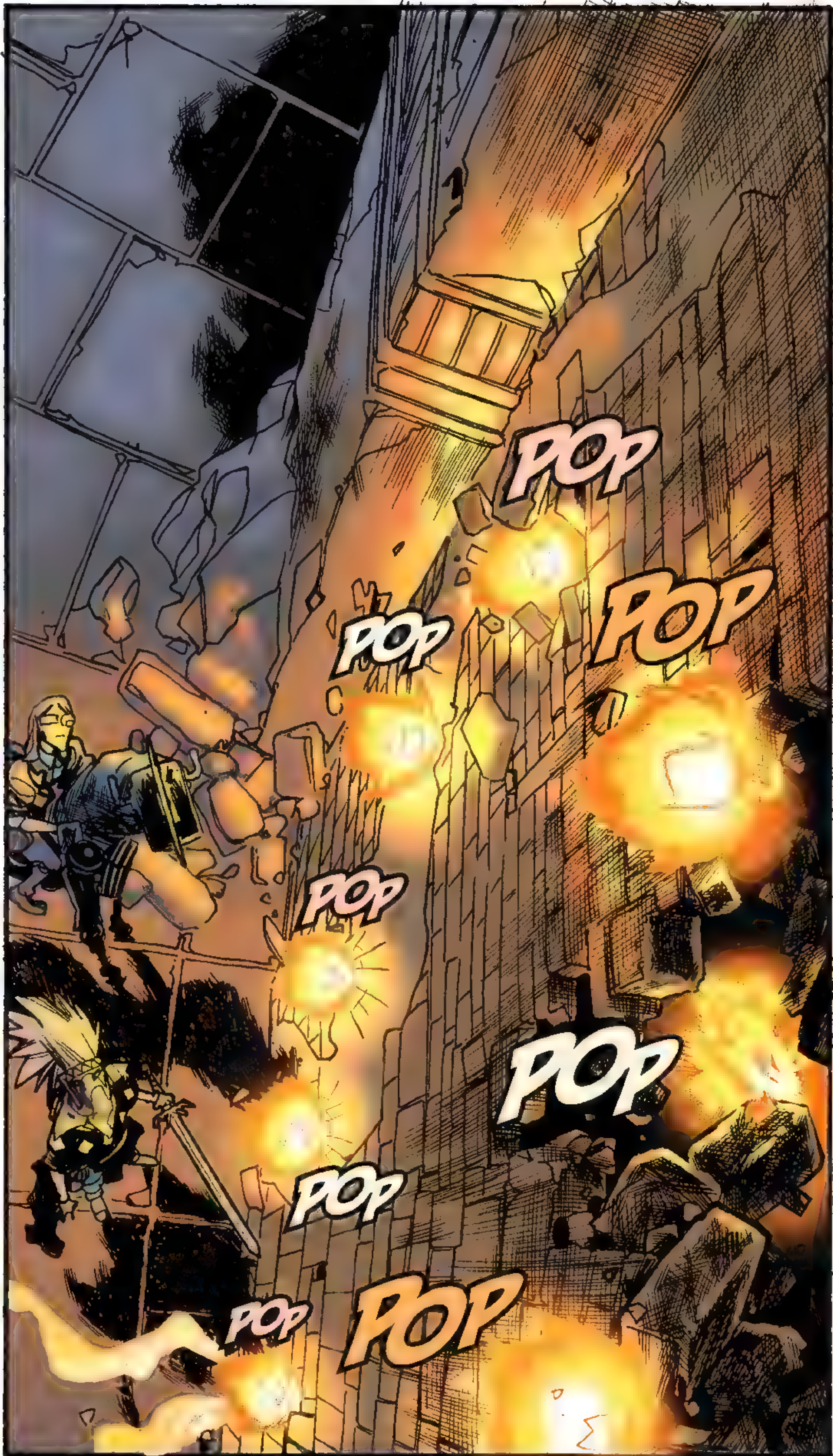


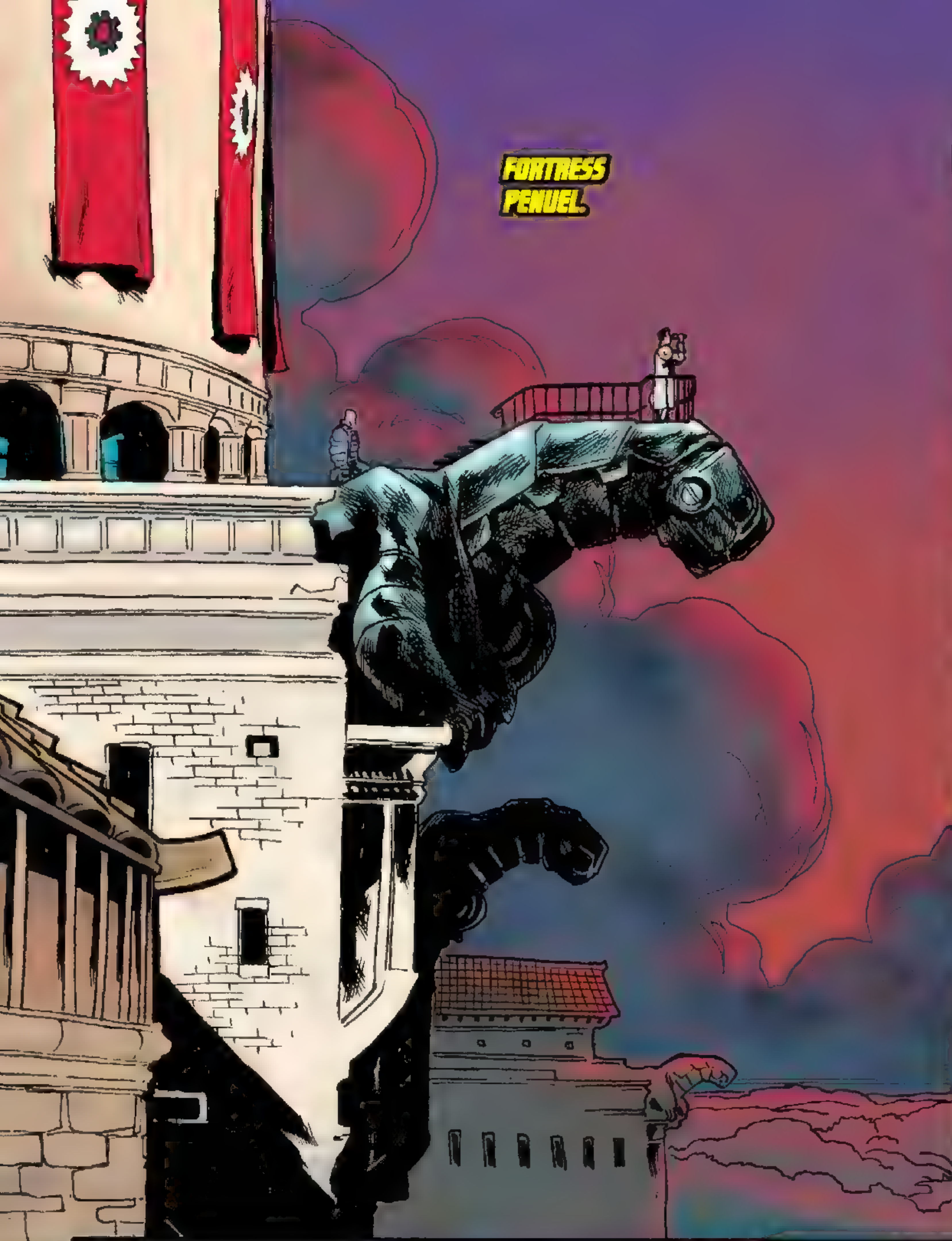
EITHER WESTIN
DIDN'T MAKE IT.
OR HE DIDN'T
TRY.

BUT
THERE ARE
FOOTPRINTS
HERE. MAYBE
HE TURNED
BACK?



WAIT...
WHAT'S
THIS?





**FORTRESS
PENUEL**



IT WON'T BE LONG NOW, GLETKIN. THE BRIDGE PEOPLE WILL SOON BE ERADICATED, ERASED FROM HISTORY--

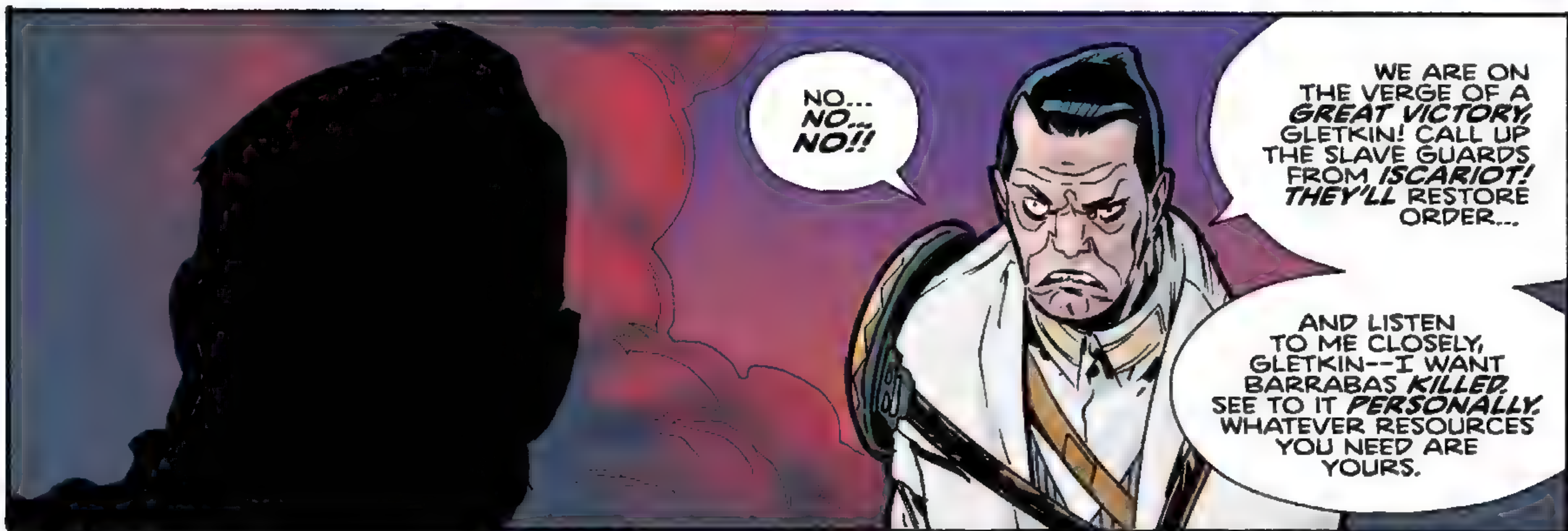
MY LORD! THERE'S **CHAOS** IN THE STREETS OF FORTRESS PENUEL!



DON BARRABAS HAS GONE **MAD**, MY LORD! HE HAS **MURDERED** EVERY TOP OFFICIAL IN THE FORTRESS AND HE'S RELEASED HIS **FOUL CREATURES** ON THE CITIZENRY!

BARRABAS?!

SHALL WE RECALL THE ARMY, MY LORD?



NO...
NO...
NO!!

WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF A **GREAT VICTORY**, GLETKIN! CALL UP THE SLAVE GUARDS FROM **ISCARIOT**! THEY'LL RESTORE ORDER...

AND LISTEN TO ME CLOSELY, GLETKIN--I WANT **BARRABAS KILLED**. SEE TO IT **PERSONALLY**. WHATEVER RESOURCES YOU NEED ARE YOURS.



DO NOT
UNDERESTIMATE
BARRABAS. HE IS...
RESOURCEFUL.

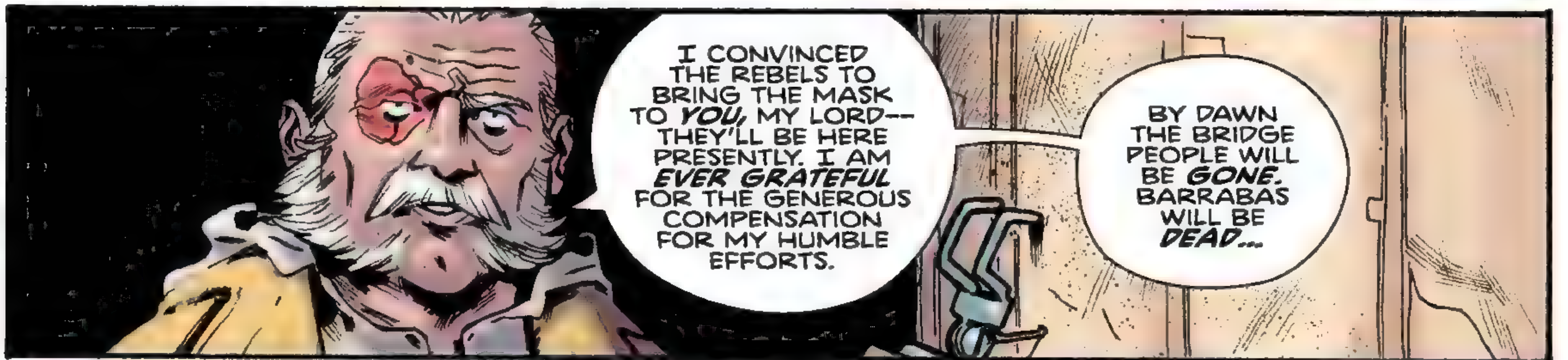
I WILL
BRING THE TRAITOR
TO JUSTICE, MY LORD!
WITH THE HELP OF
THIS MAN.



GOOD
DAY...MY
LORD.

WESTIN'S
HIS NAME, LONG-
TIME INFORMANT,
WEAPONS MAN.
THERE'S NO JOB HE
CAN'T GET DONE--IF
THE PRICE IS RIGHT.
HIS EXPLOSIVES AND
POISONS ARE MORE
THAN A MATCH FOR
BARRABAS.

AND...
HE'S BEEN
EMBEDDED
WITH THE
REBELS FOR
SOME TIME.

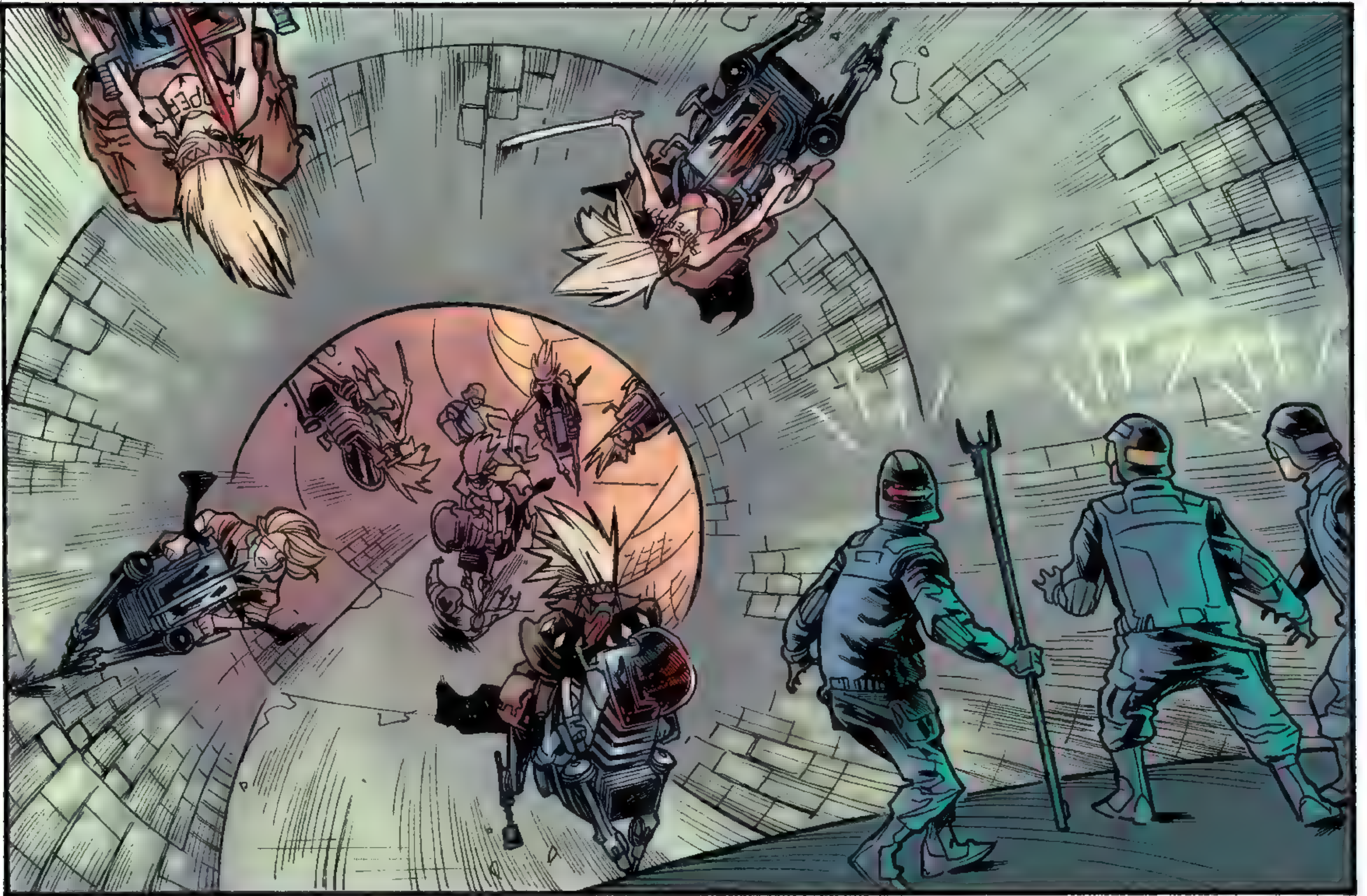
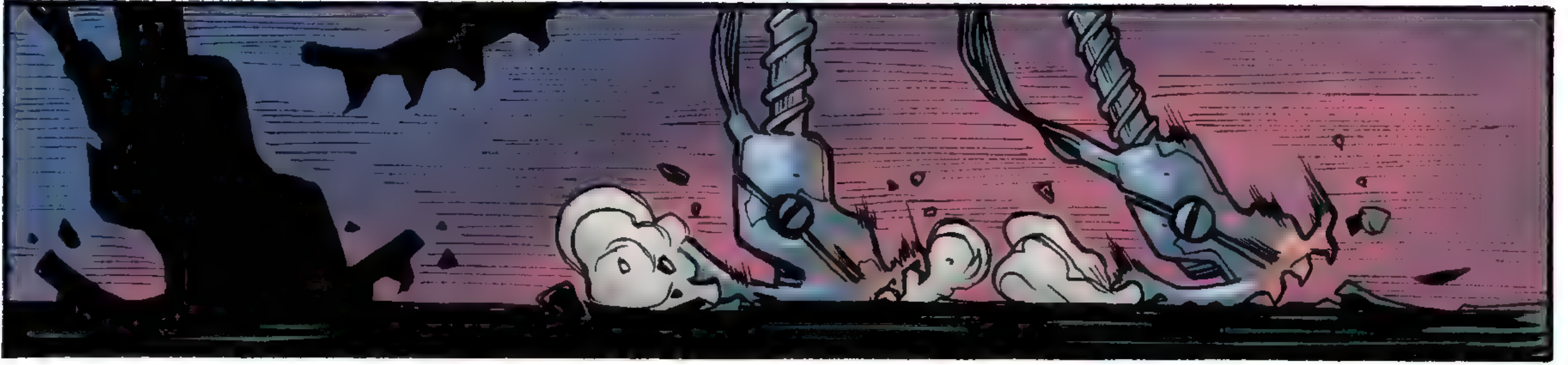


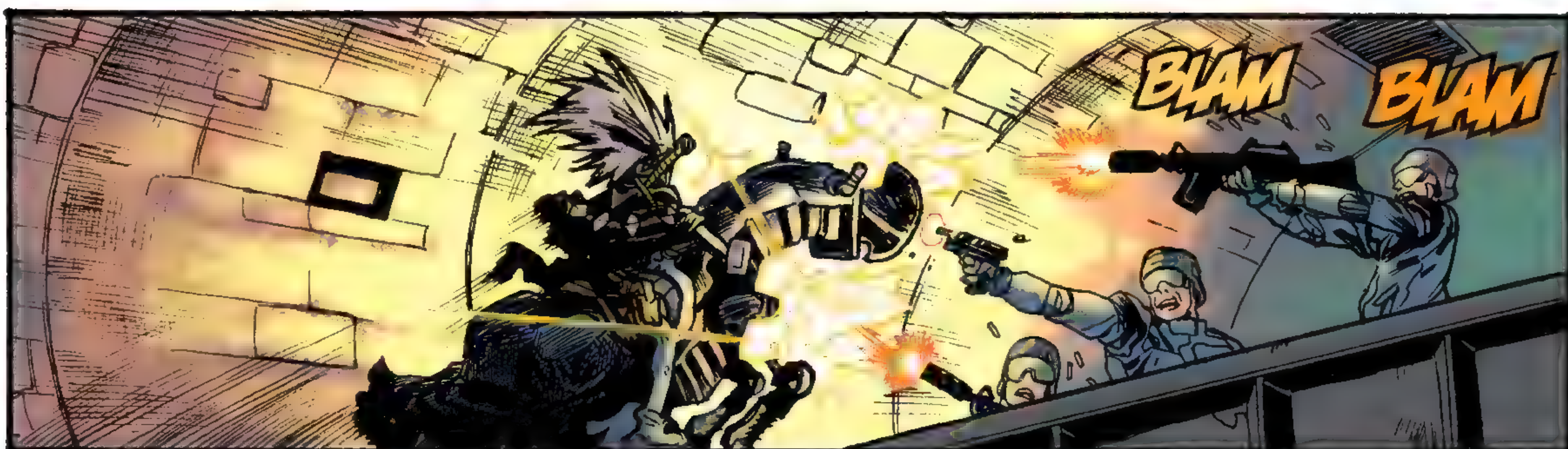
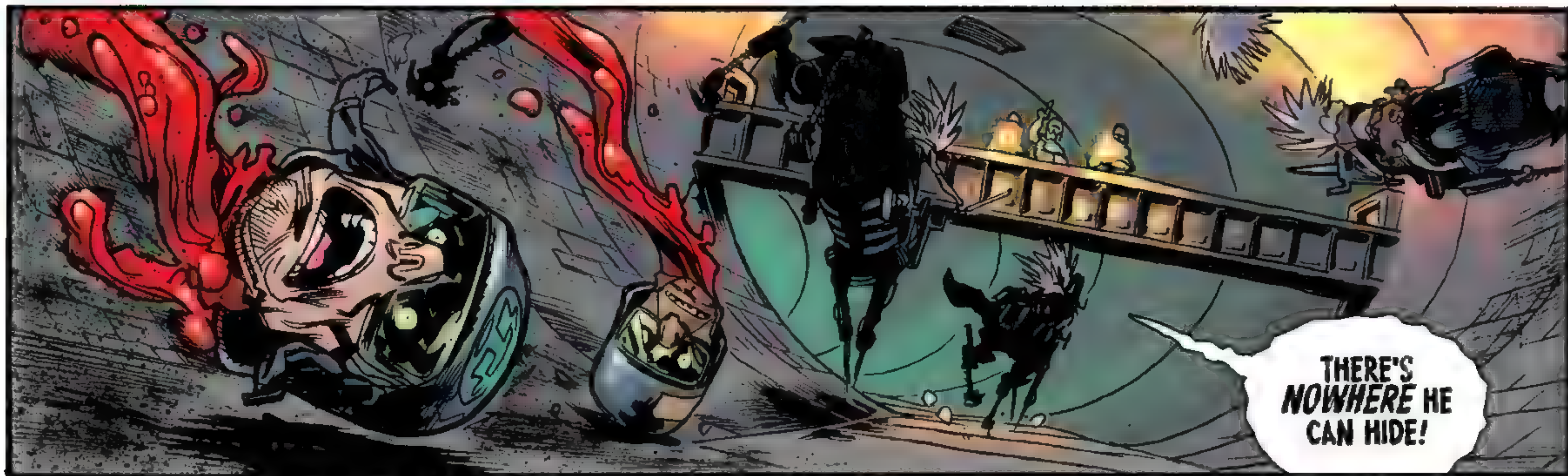
I CONVINCED
THE REBELS TO
BRING THE MASK
TO **YOU**, MY LORD--
THEY'LL BE HERE
PRESENTLY. I AM
EVER GRATEFUL
FOR THE GENEROUS
COMPENSATION
FOR MY HUMBLE
EFFORTS.

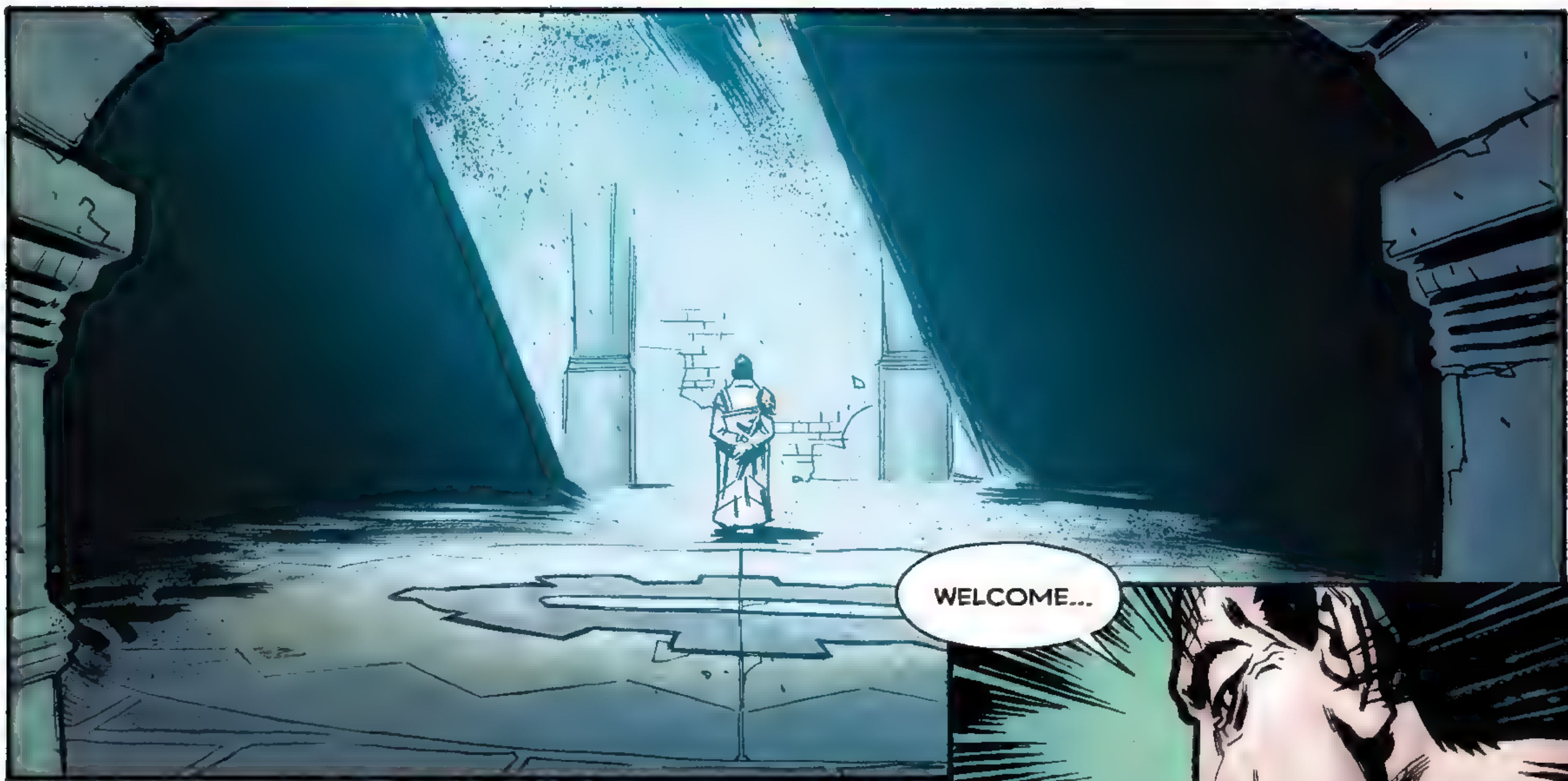
BY DAWN
THE BRIDGE
PEOPLE WILL
BE **GONE**.
BARRABAS
WILL BE
DEAD...

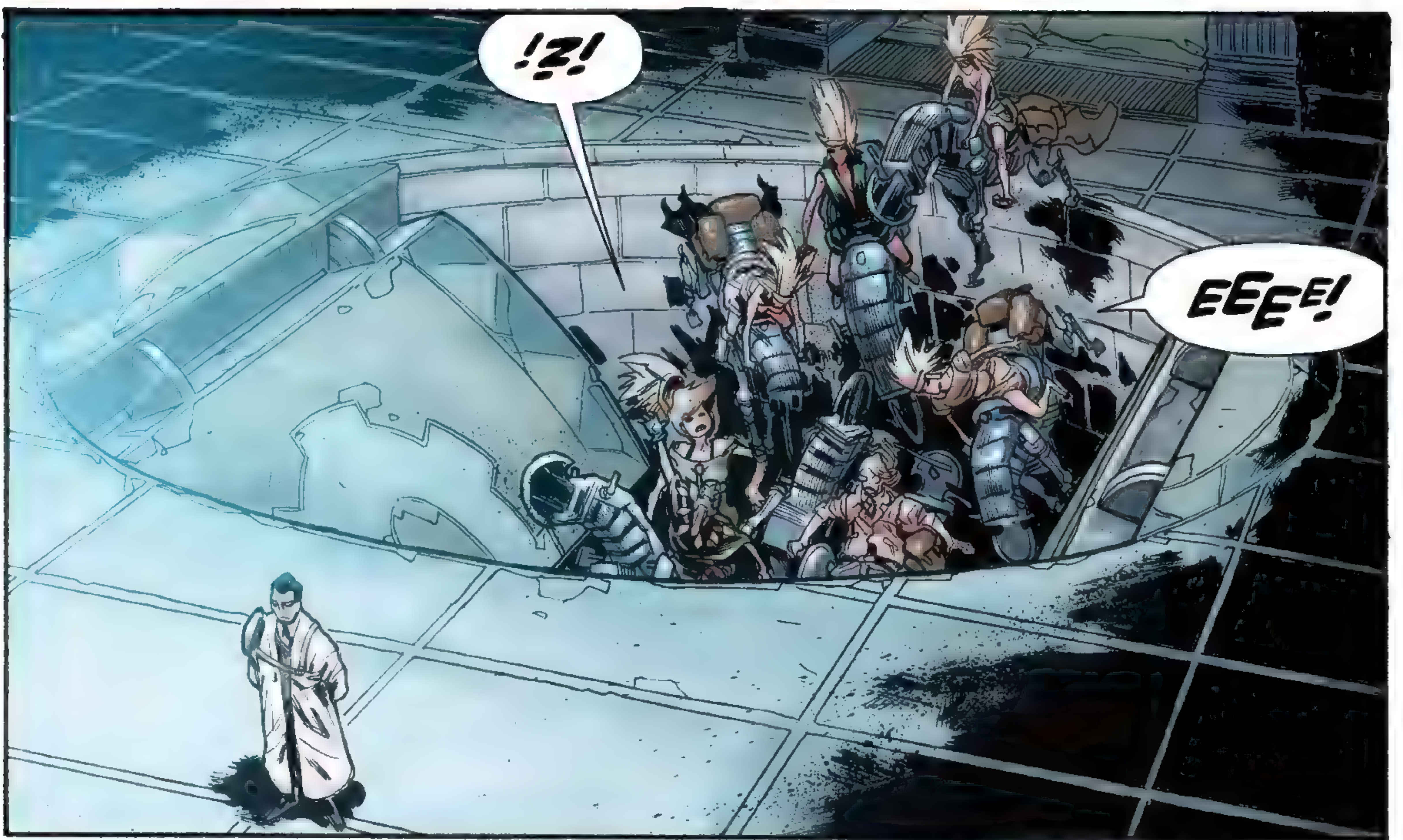


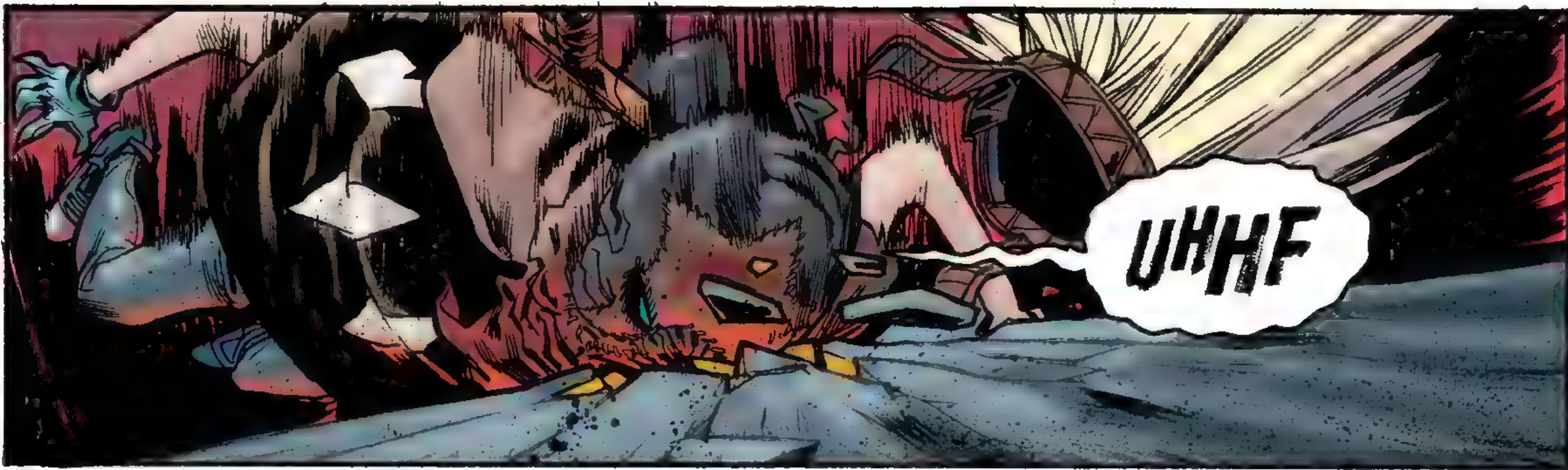
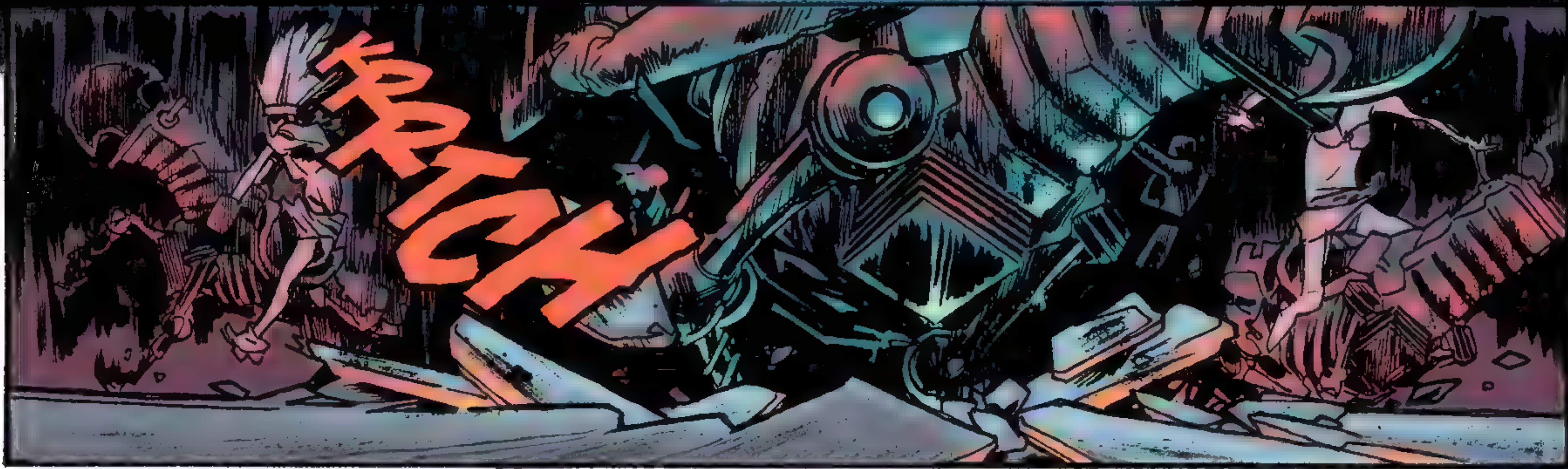
...AND
AT LAST, **DON**
WESTIN--THE
MASK WILL BE
MINE.

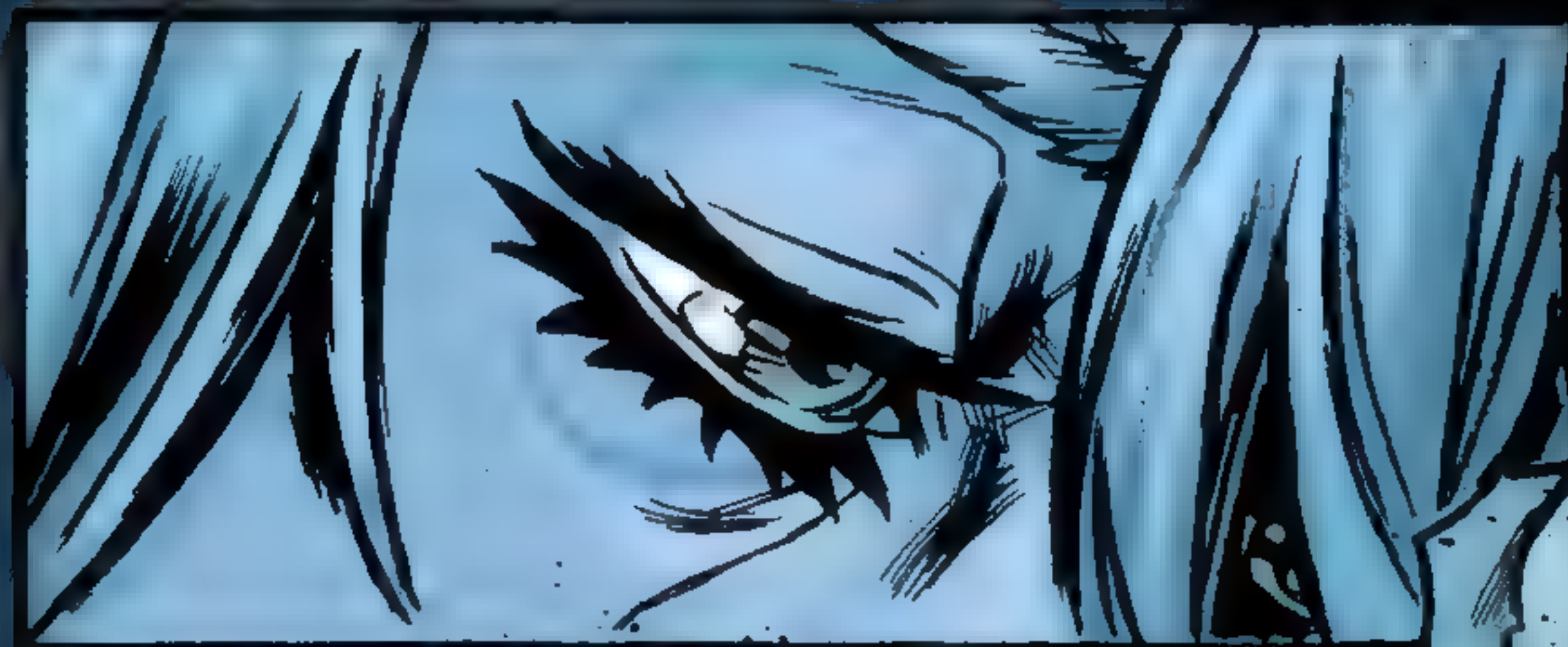






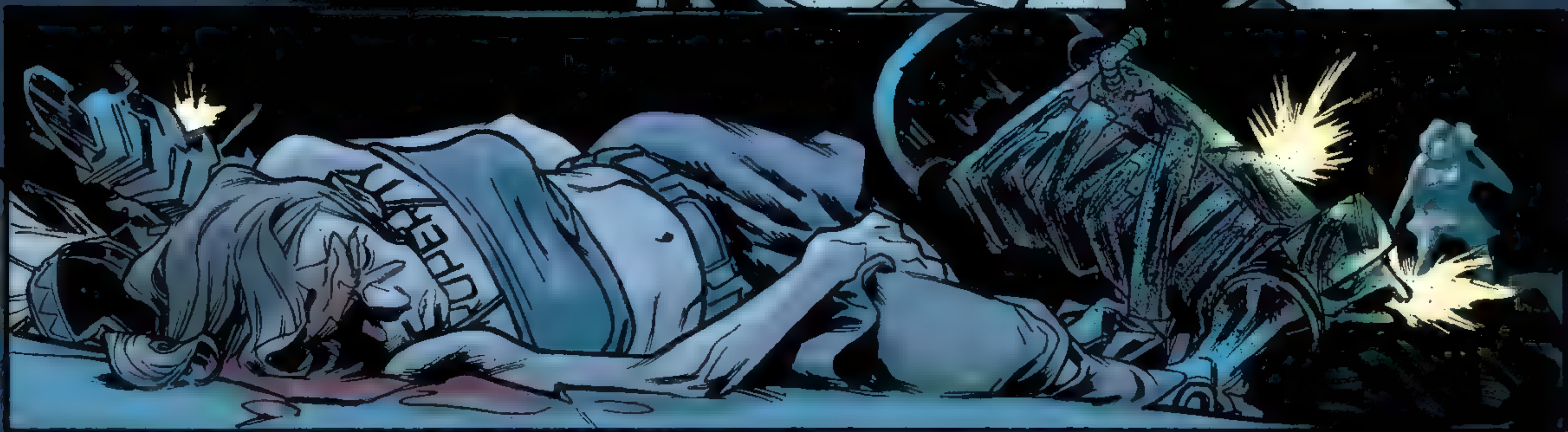






O-ORCHID?

A-ANYONE?



COME ON
NOW. *SUMPH*
LET'S GET UP,
SHALL WE?
IT'S ONLY A
SCRATCH,
SEE?

Uhhhh...



GRR-
KK-K

W-WHAT'S
THAT
NOISE?

I'M HERE
LAIKA. IT'S
GOING TO BE
ALL RIGHT...

NO--
I DON'T
THINK IT
IS.





WELCOME
TO THE
DUNGEONS
OF FORTRESS
PENUEL,
THE *SLAVE*
LEVEL.

A
FITTING
SITE TO
BRING
THIS
MATTER
TO AN
END.



HAH!
LOOK WHAT
THE *SHADOW*
REBELS HAVE SENT
TO FACE THE MIGHT
OF TOMO WOLFE!
A HANDFUL OF
PITIFUL VALK
WHORES.



COME
DOWN HERE
AND WE'LL
SHOW YOU HOW
PITIFUL VALK
WHORES
FIGHT...



GURG-
KK

THERE'S NO
NEED FOR ME
TO DIRTY MY
HANDS WITH
YOU, BRIDGE
VERMIN. YOU
SEE...



...YOU'RE
NOT
ALONE.

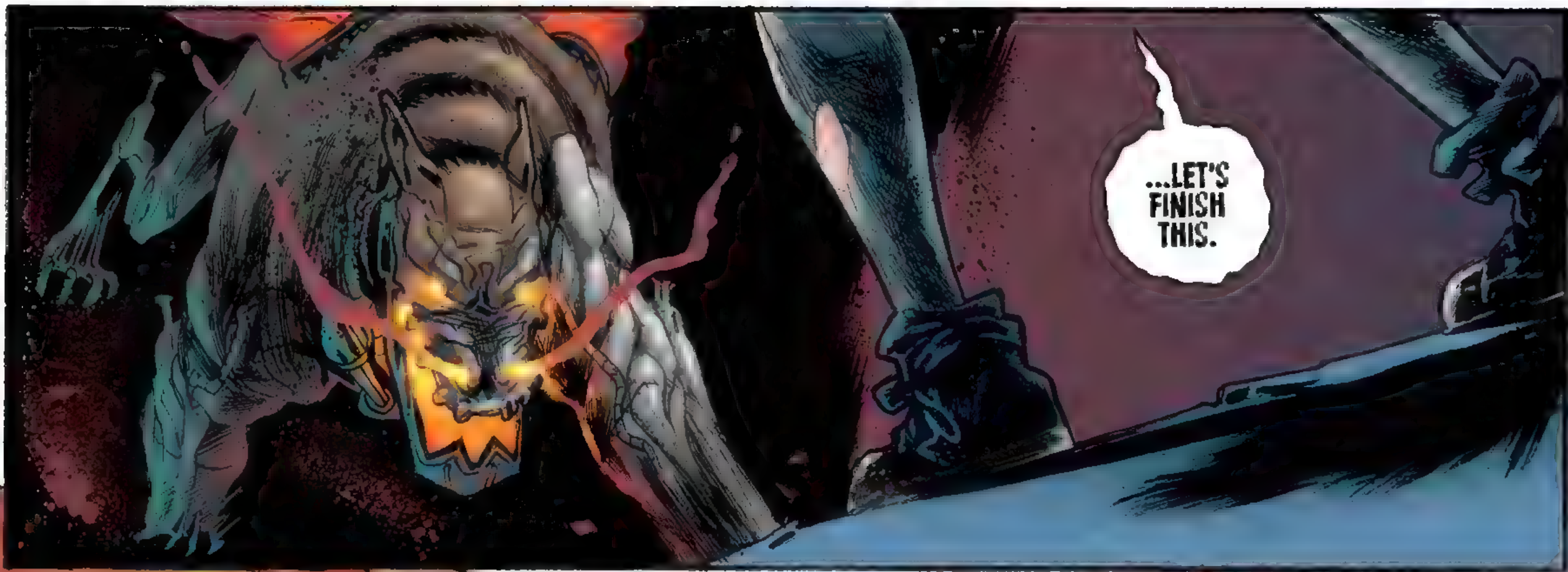


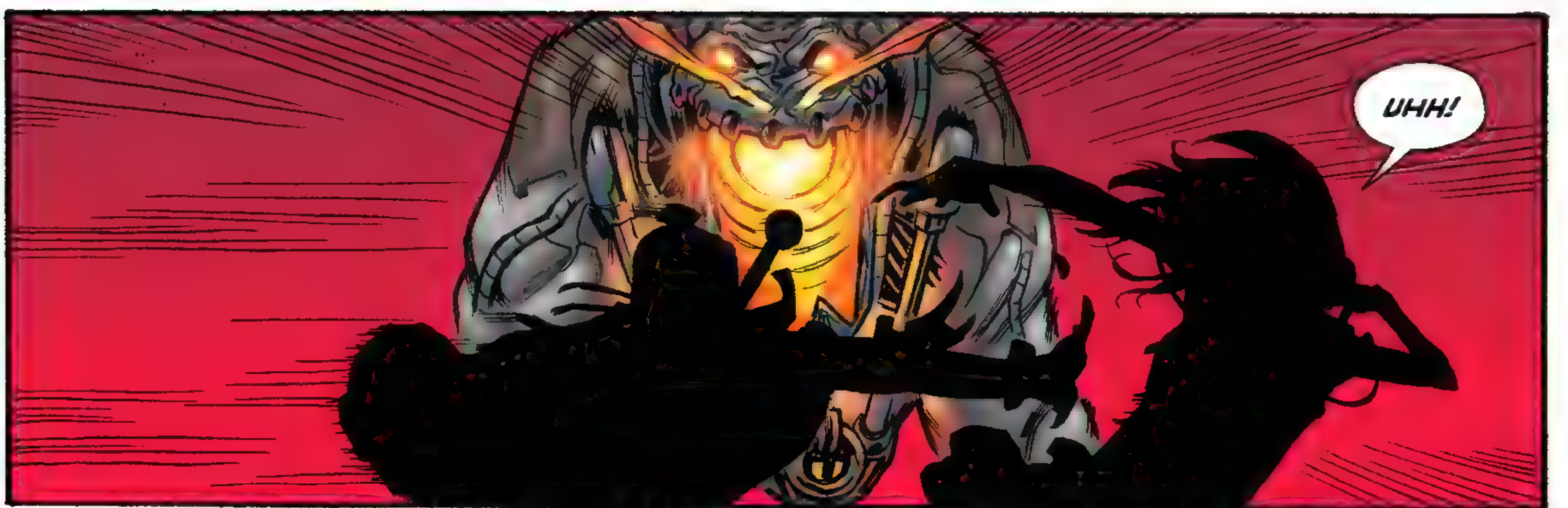
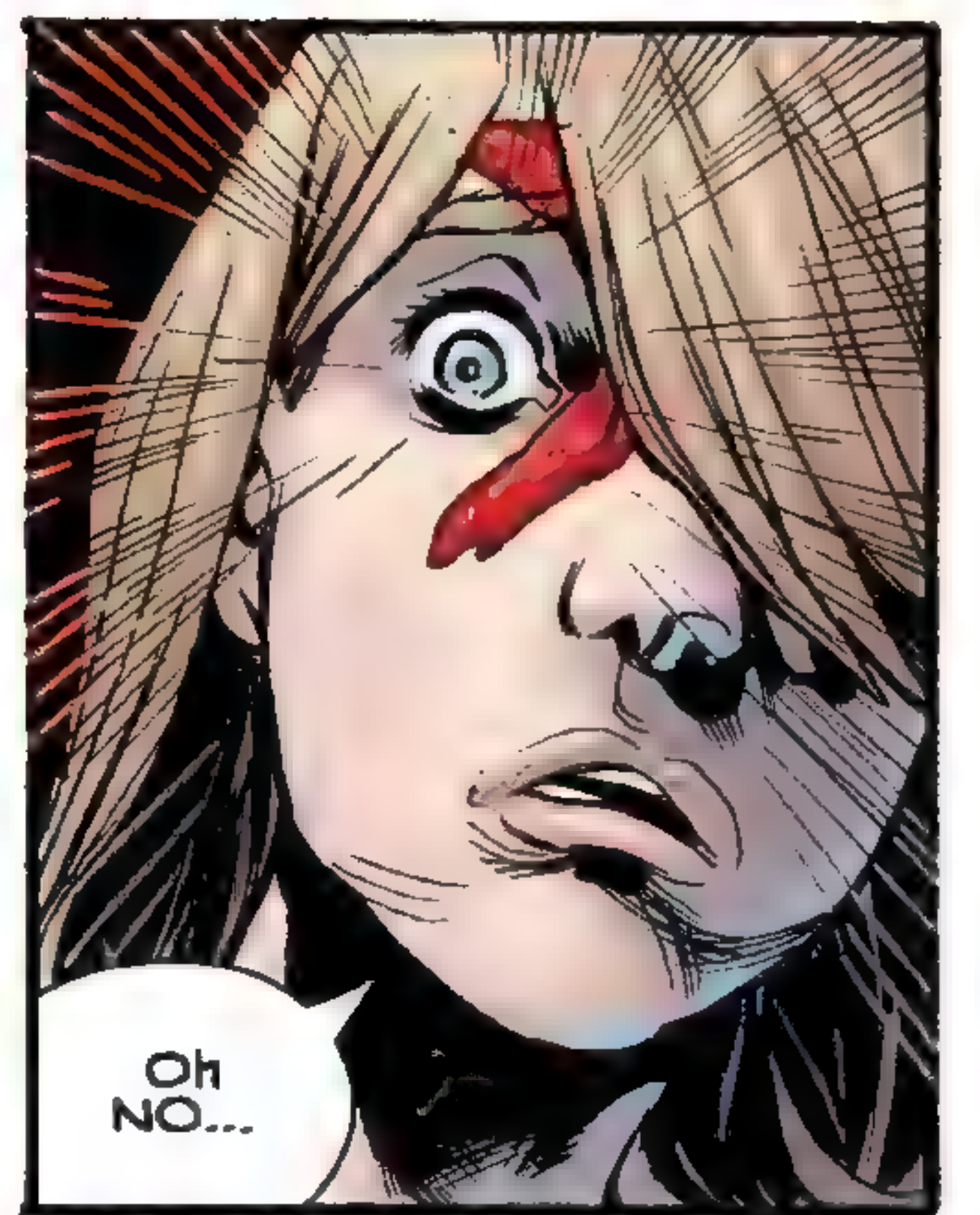
ARRK-
KK

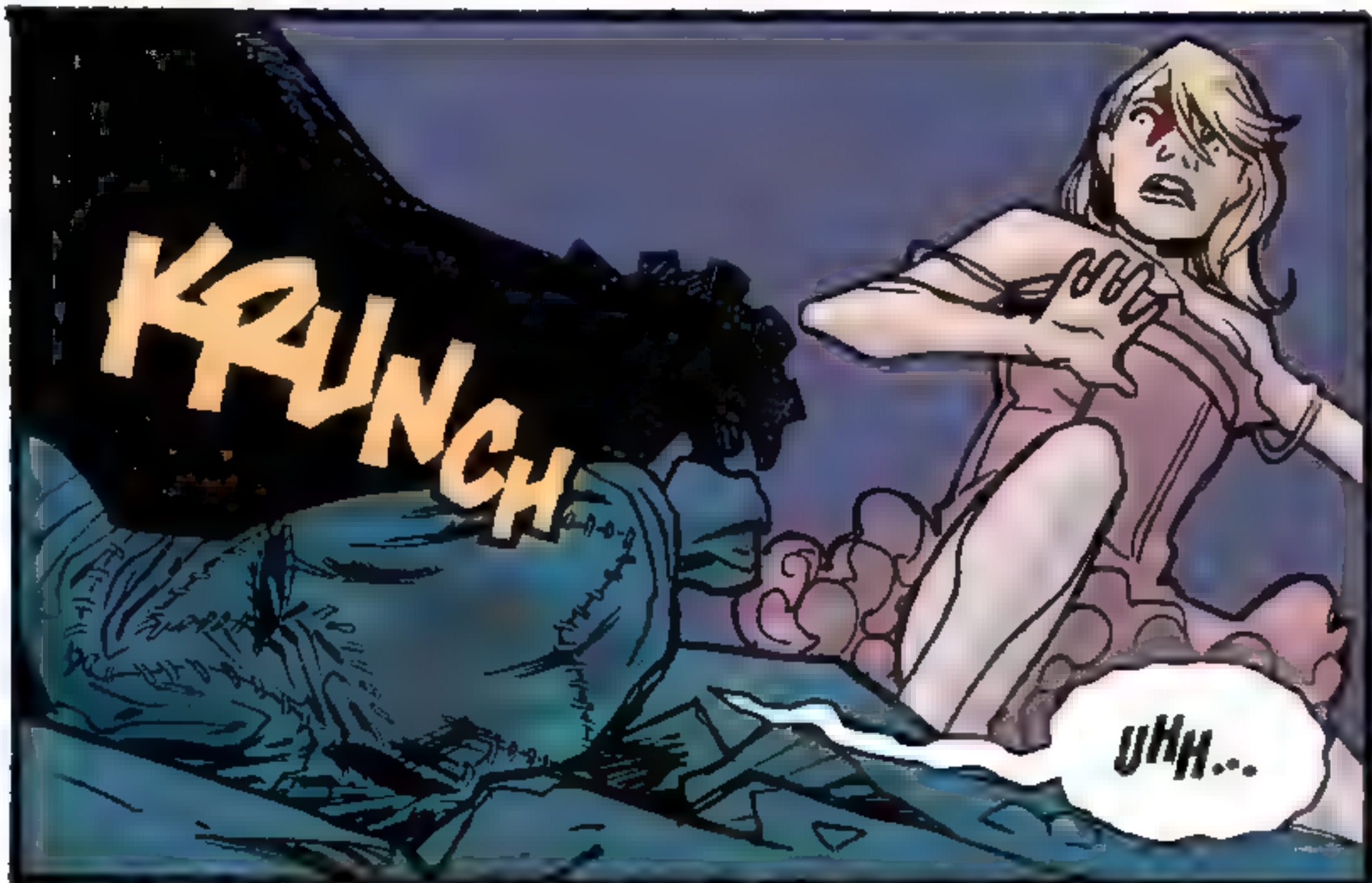
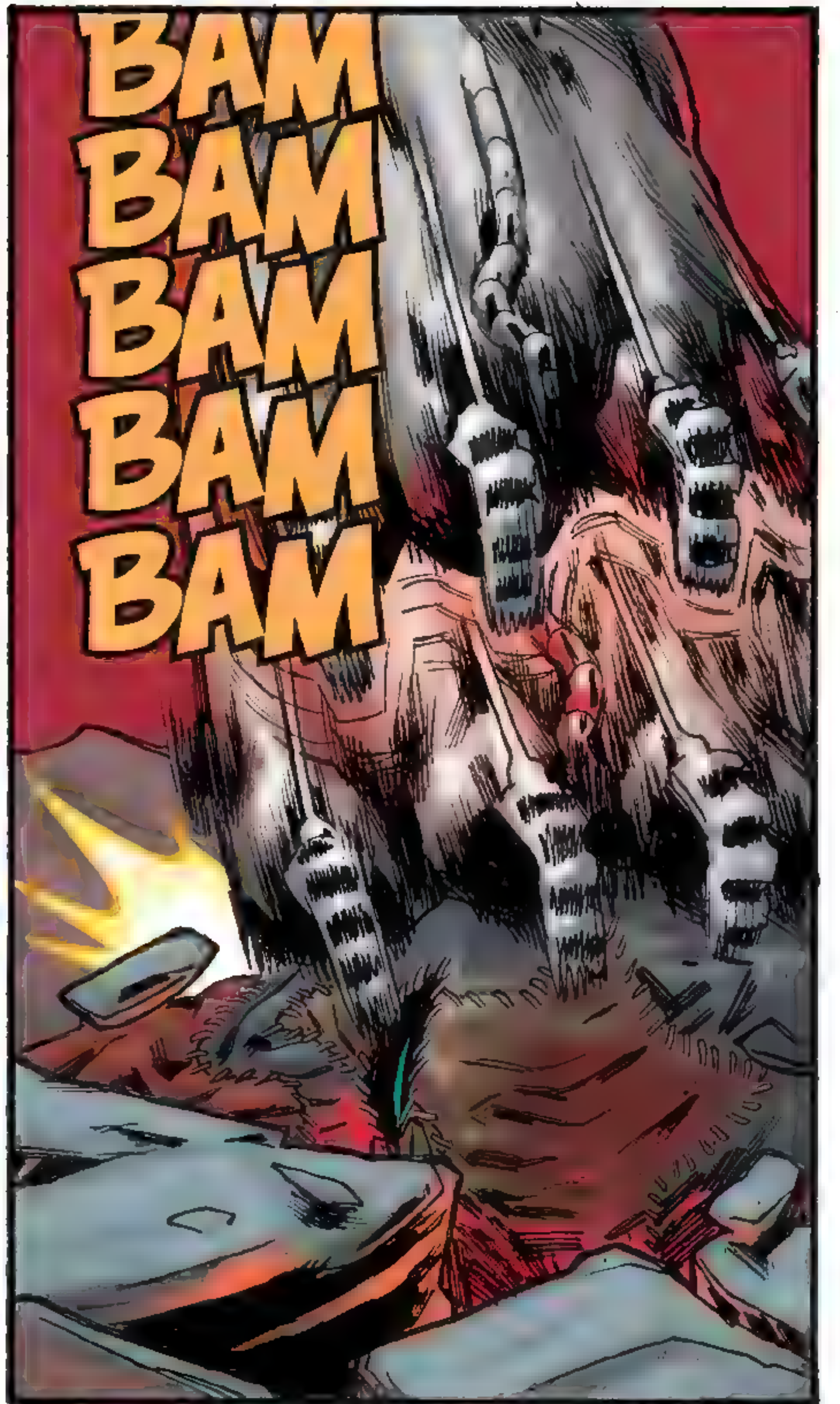


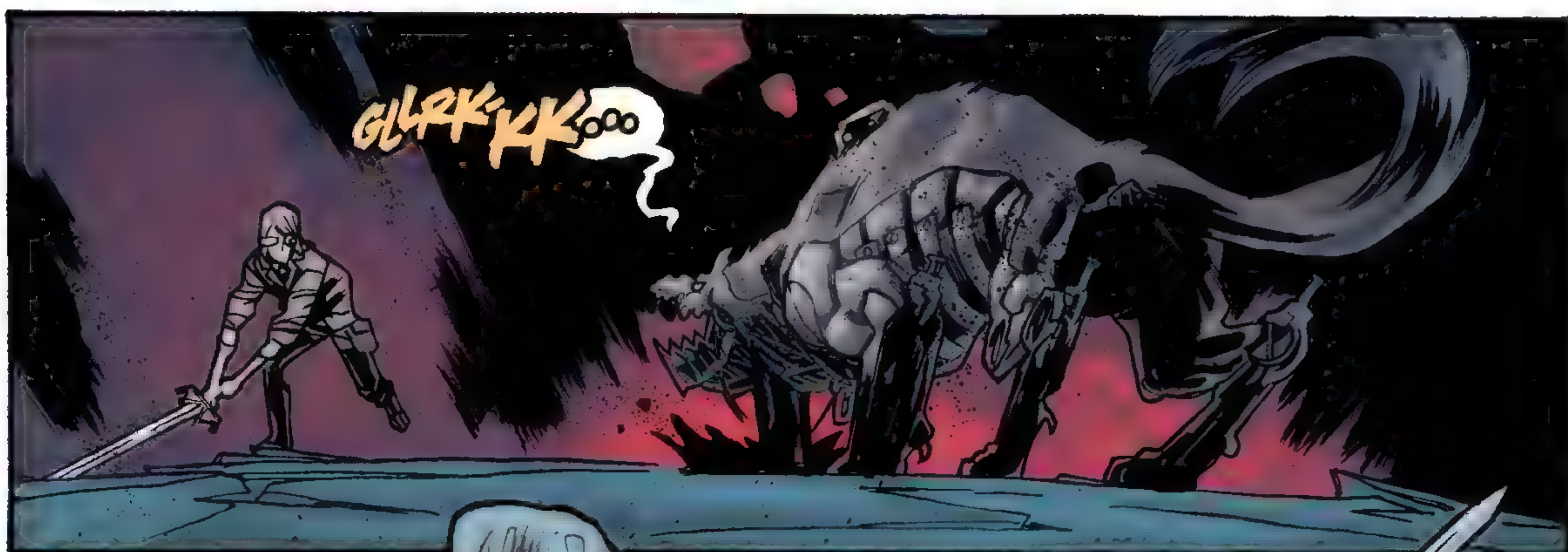
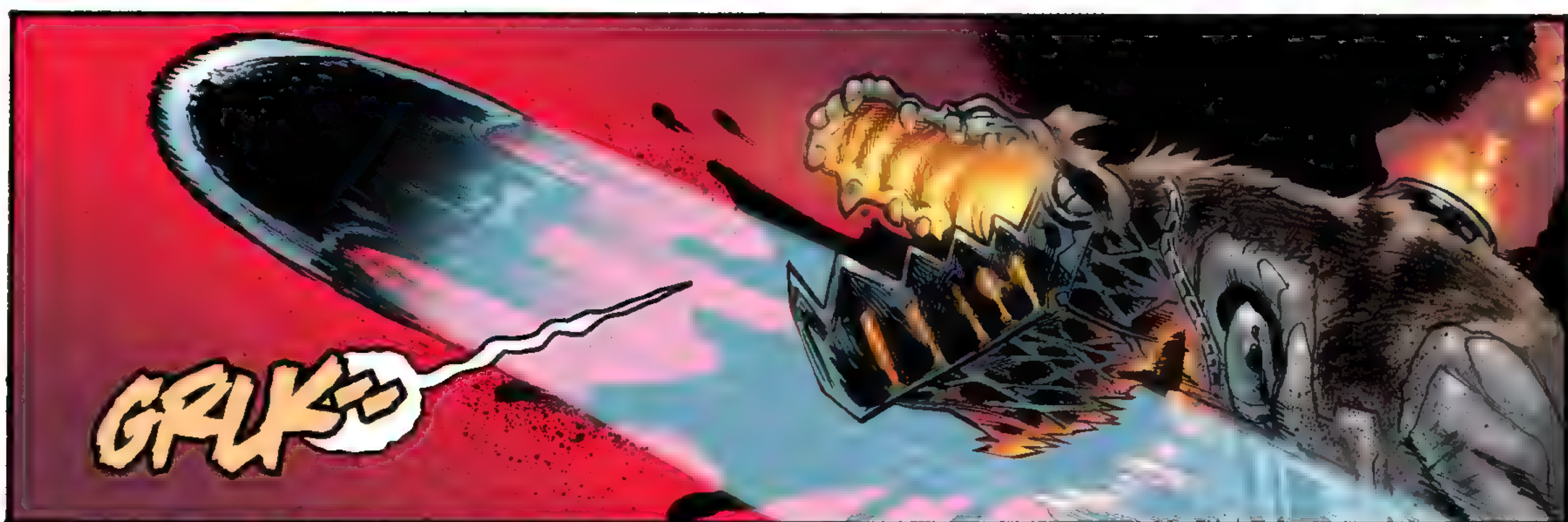
SIRE
VARESH!

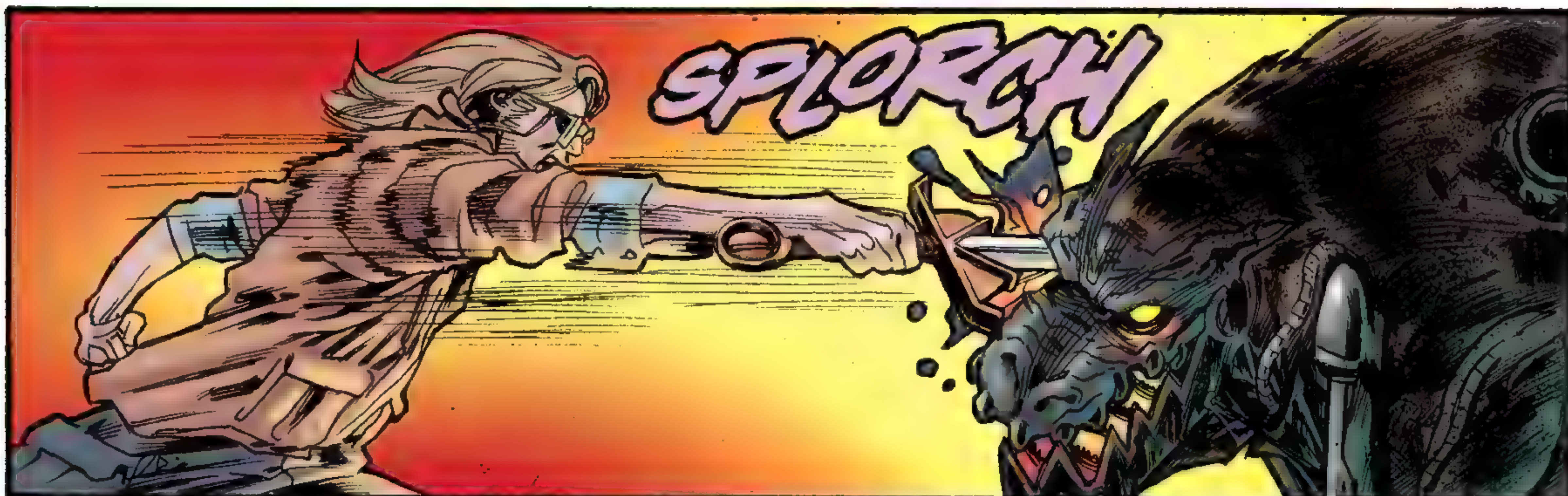
COME ON,
THEN...

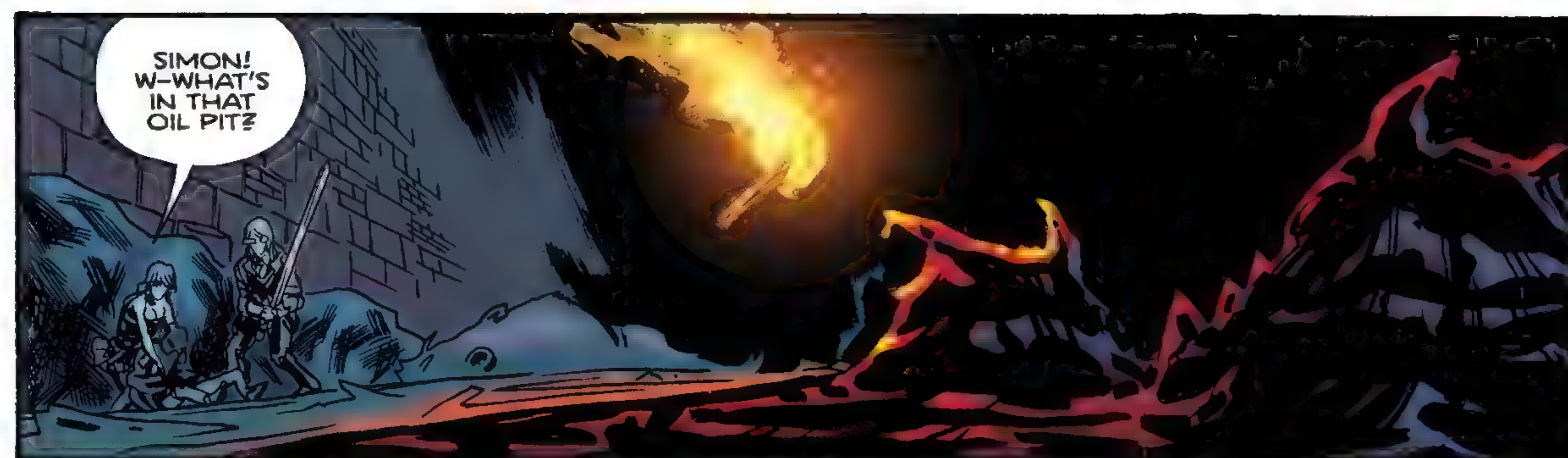












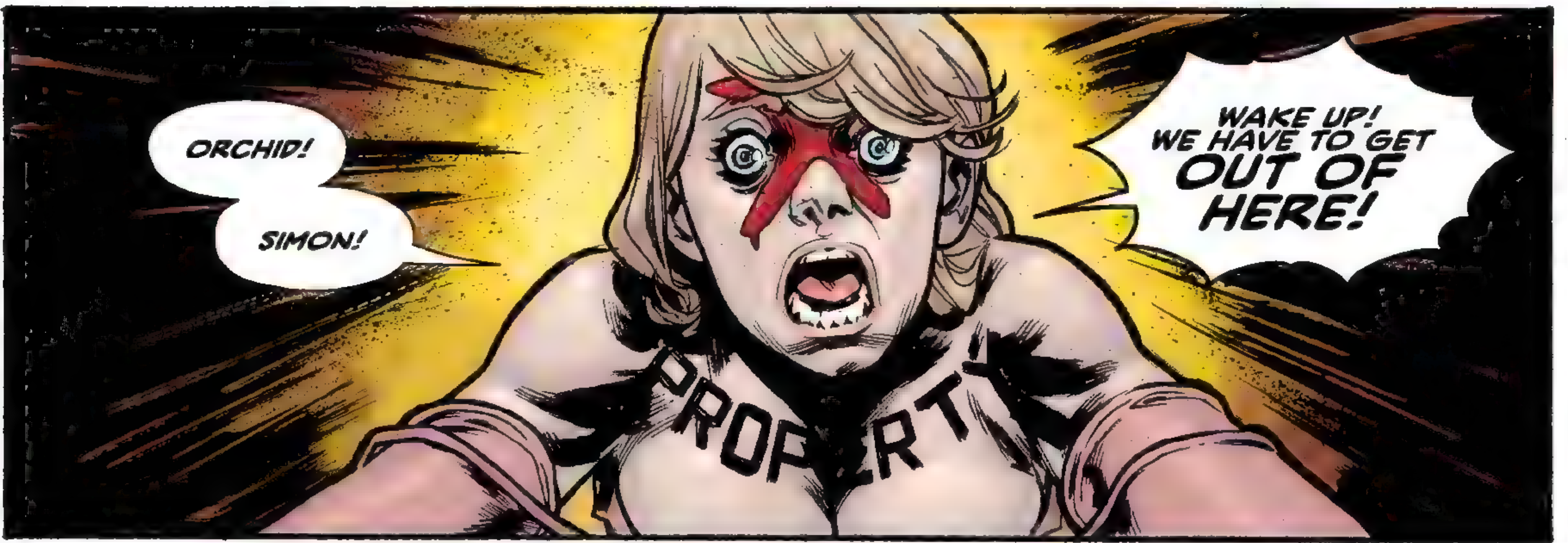
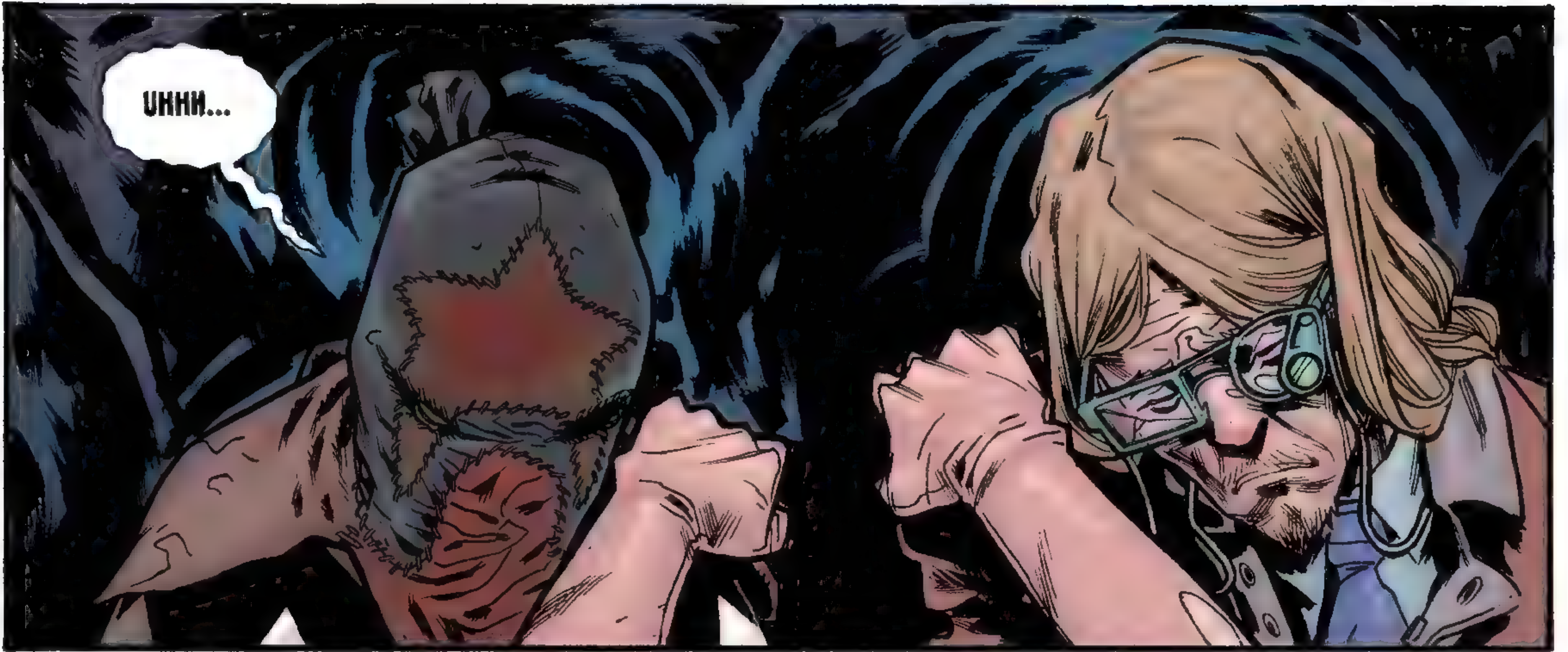


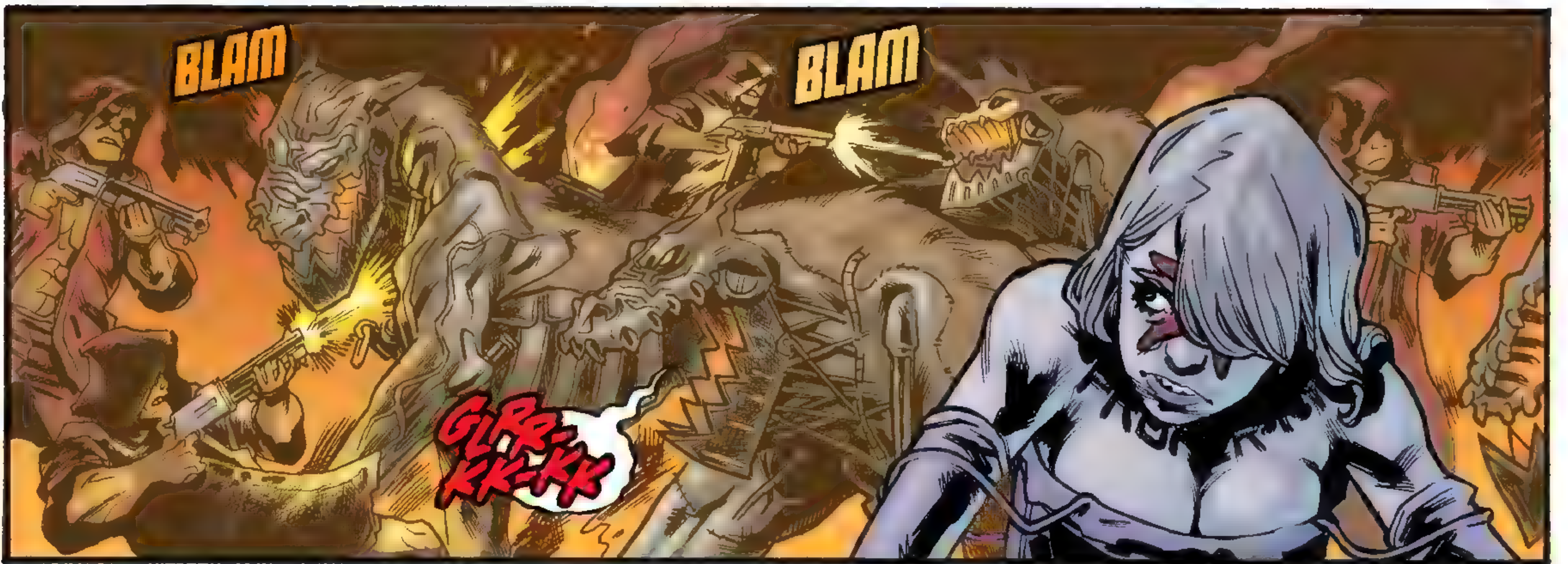














THAT MONSTER BARRABAS IS KILLING MY SIRE VARASHEEN! STOP HIM, WESTIN...

...BEFORE HE COMES UP *HERE!*

MY, MY. FIRST, IT'S *DON* WESTIN. AND DON'T WORRY.

BARRABAS WON'T LEAVE THIS ROOM ALIVE.



LAIKA... IS SIMON ALIVE?

YES, BUT--

THEN GET HIM OUT OF HERE BEFORE THEY TURN ON US!

HOW?! THIS IS CRAZY!

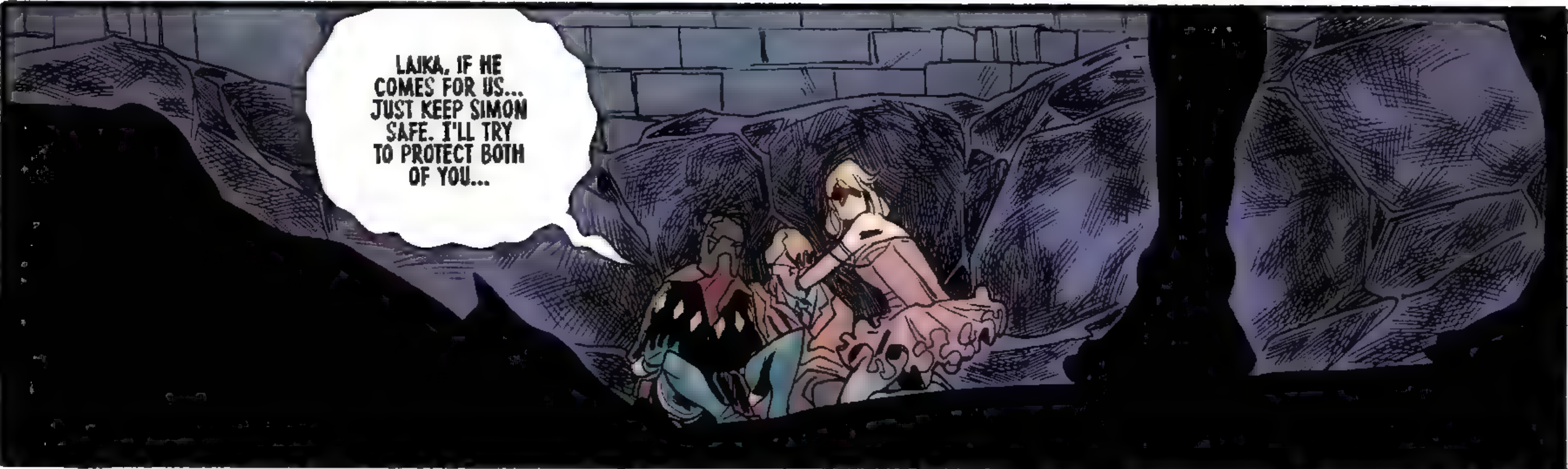
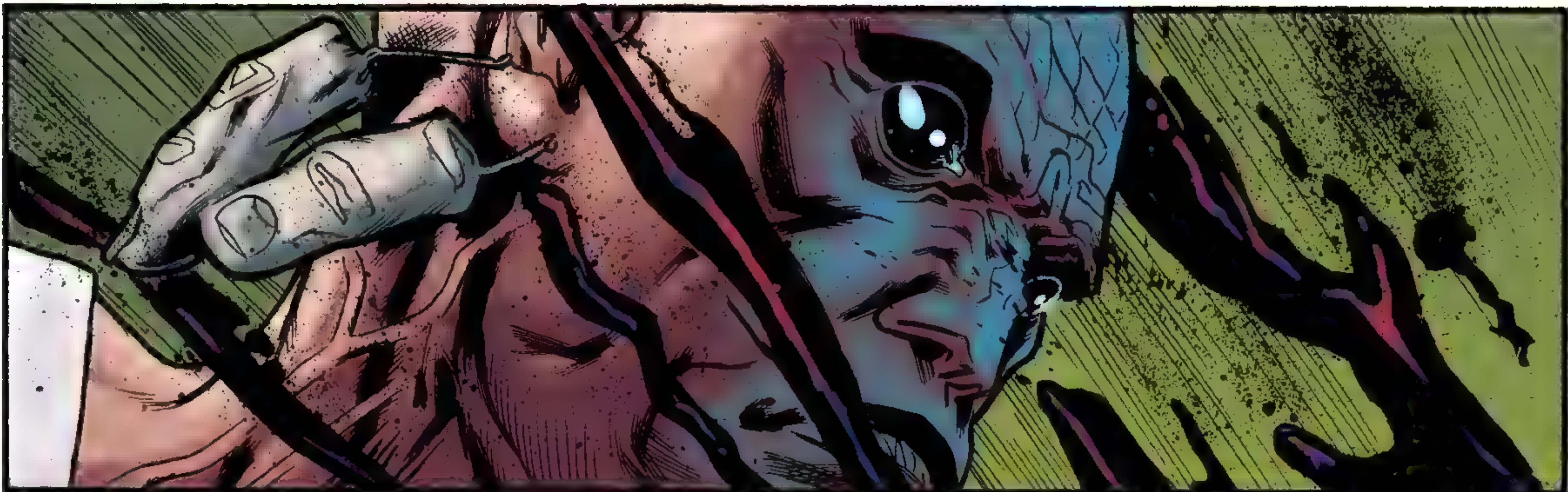
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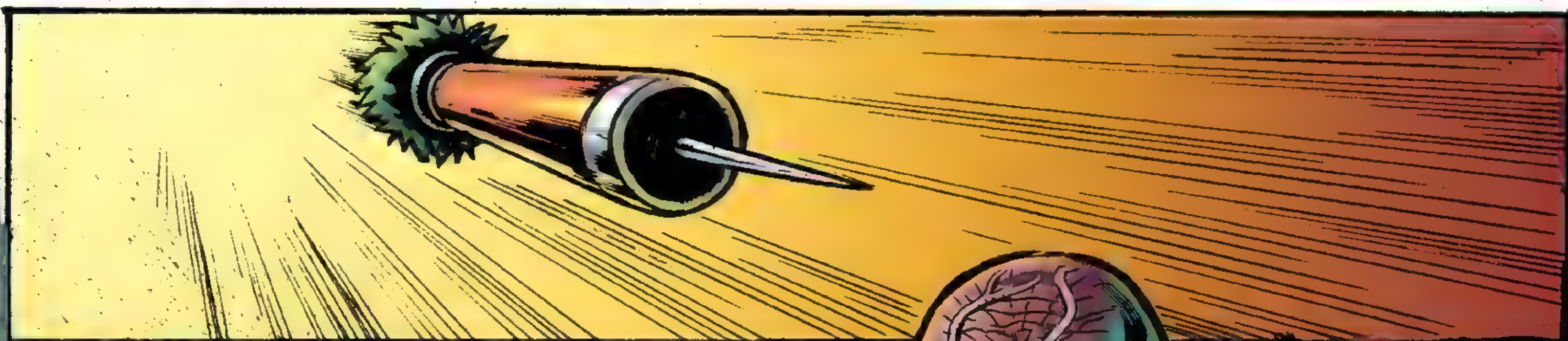
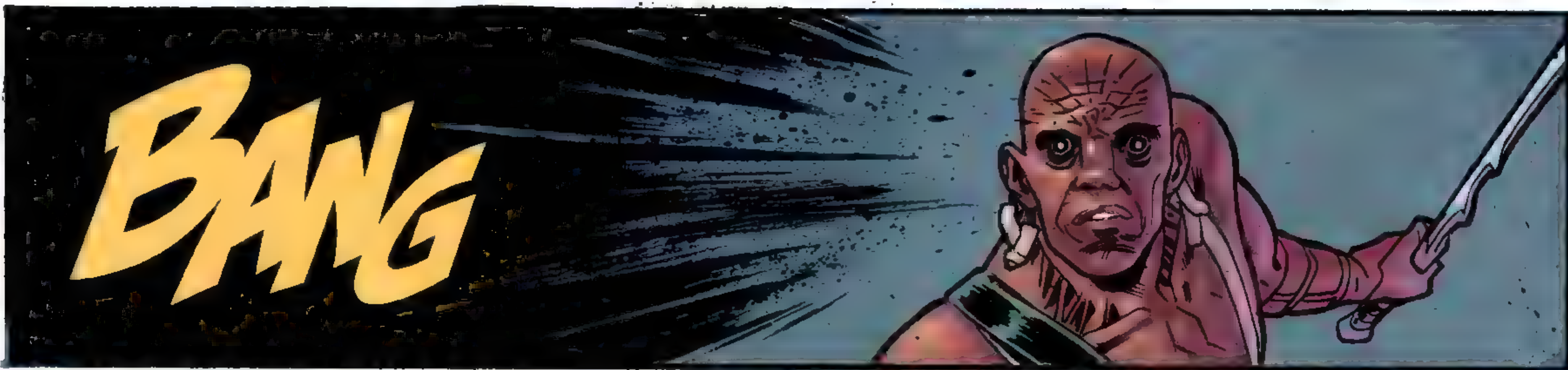


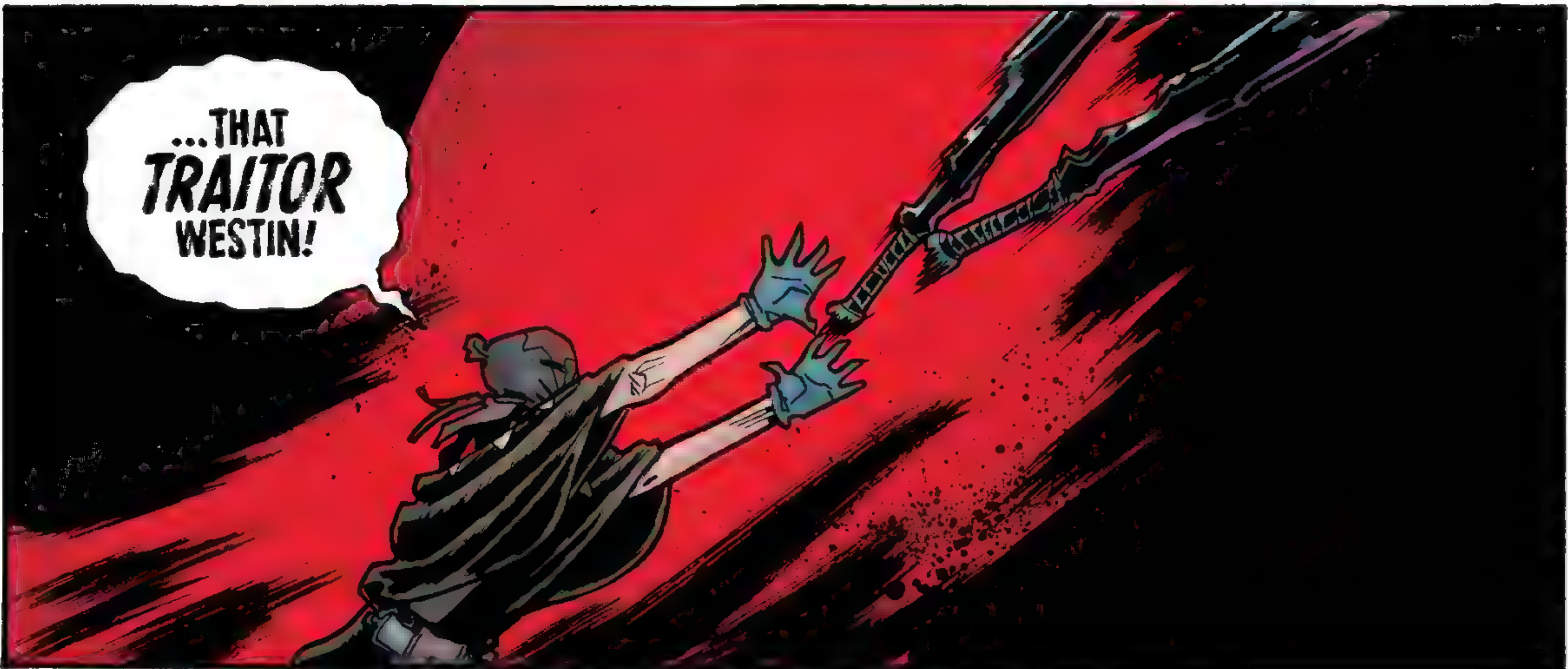
BLAM

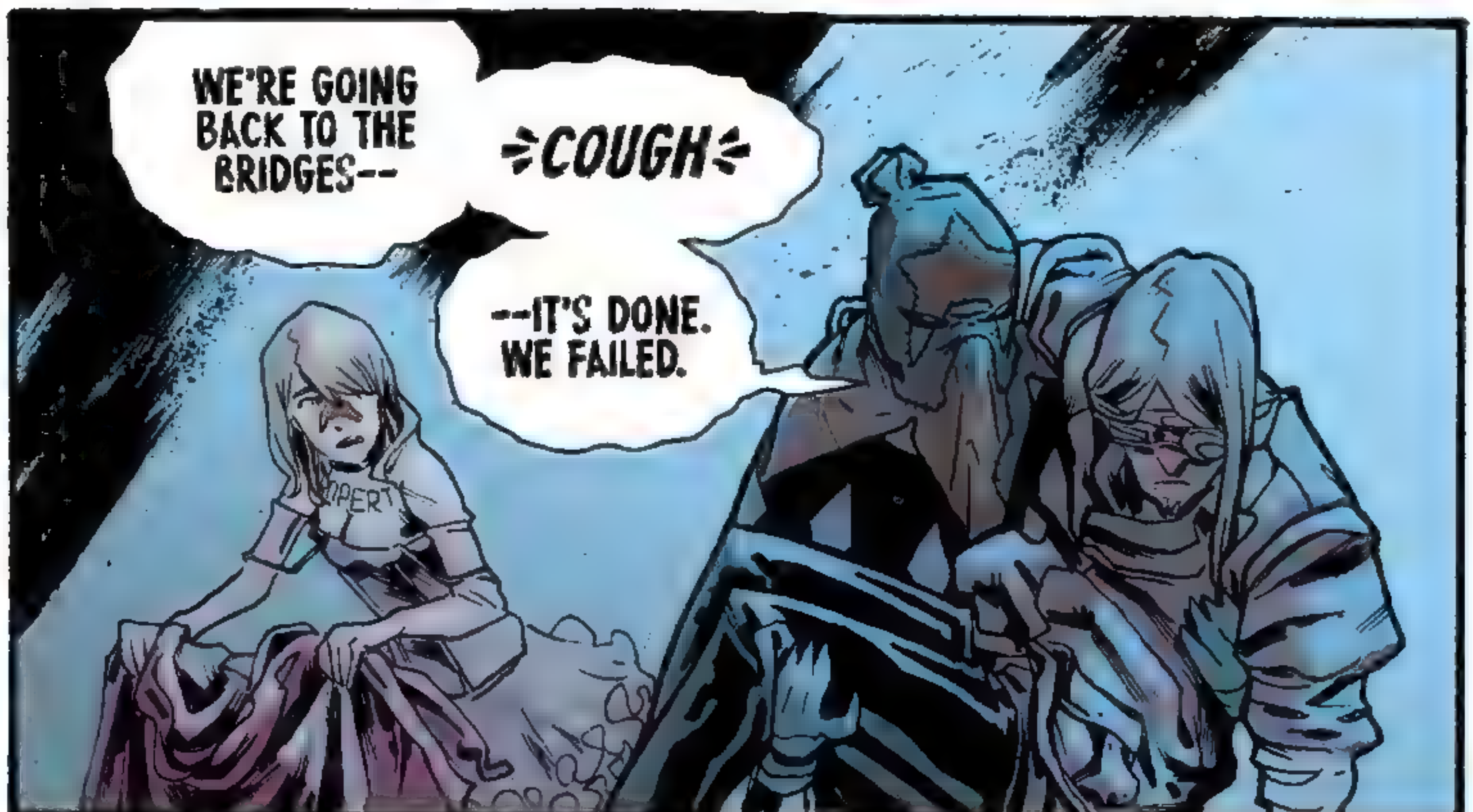
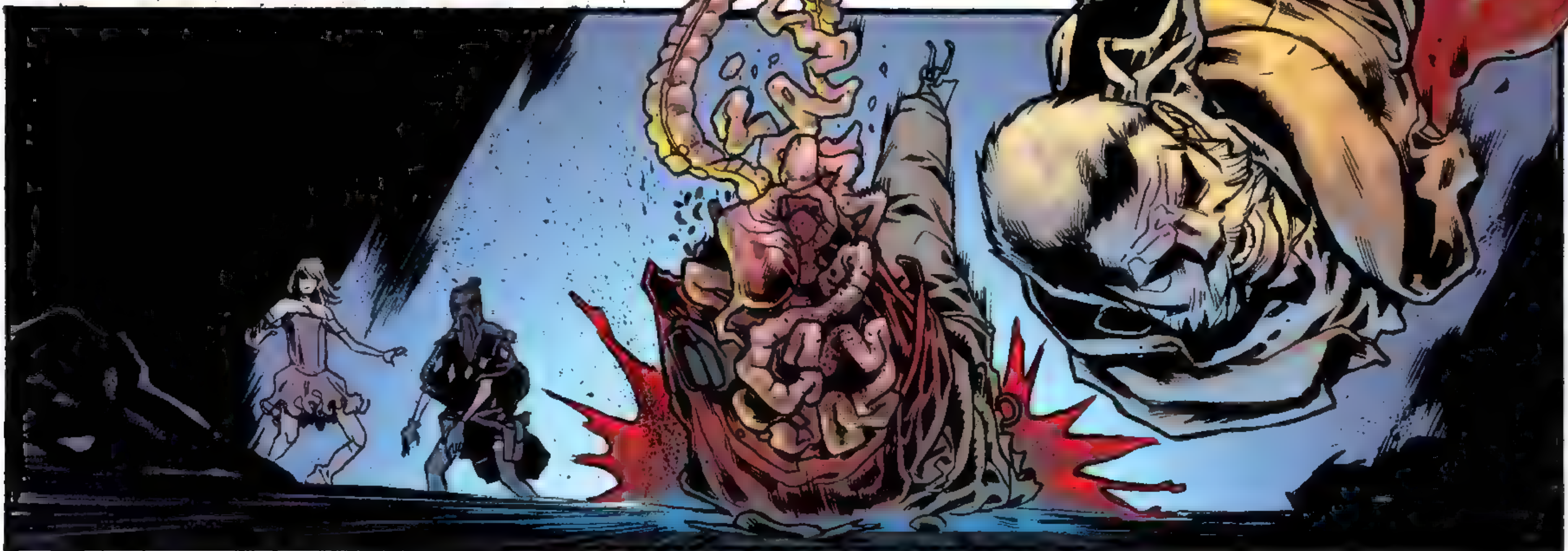
ARKK
KK-GRUK

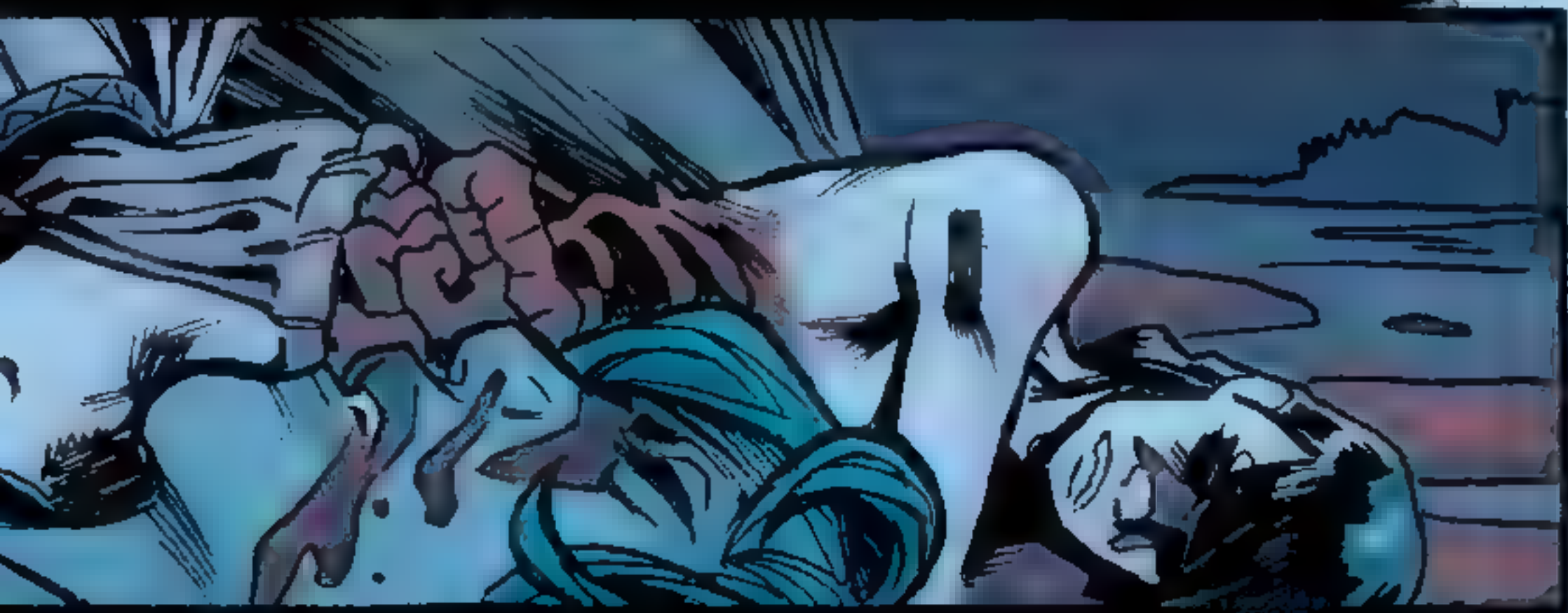




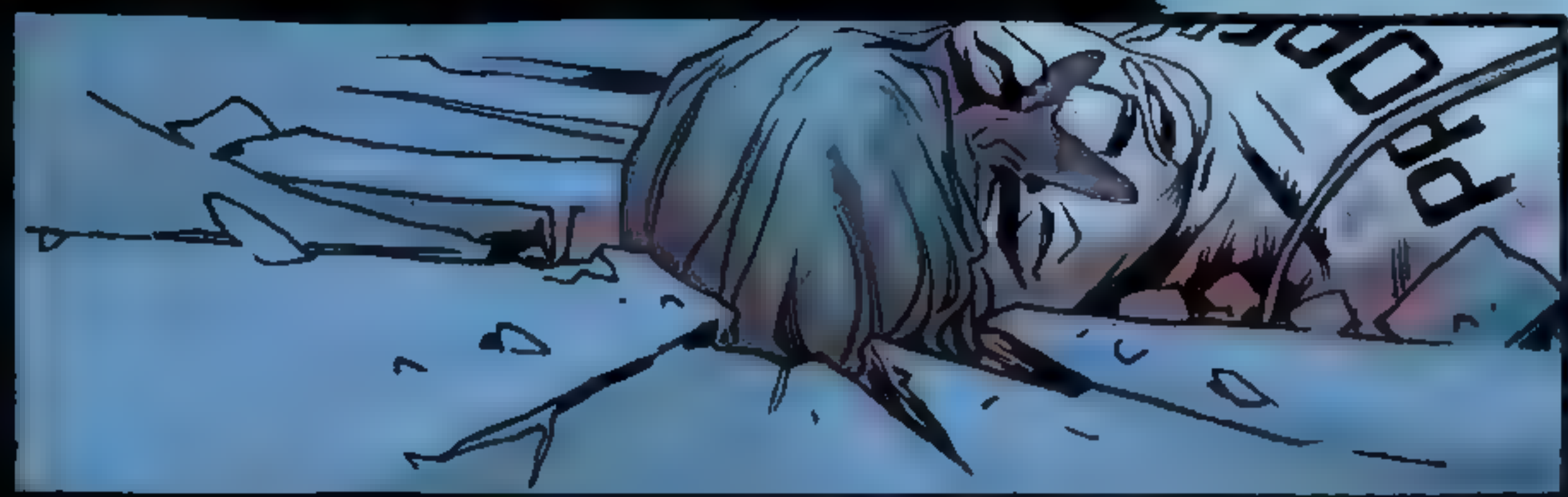




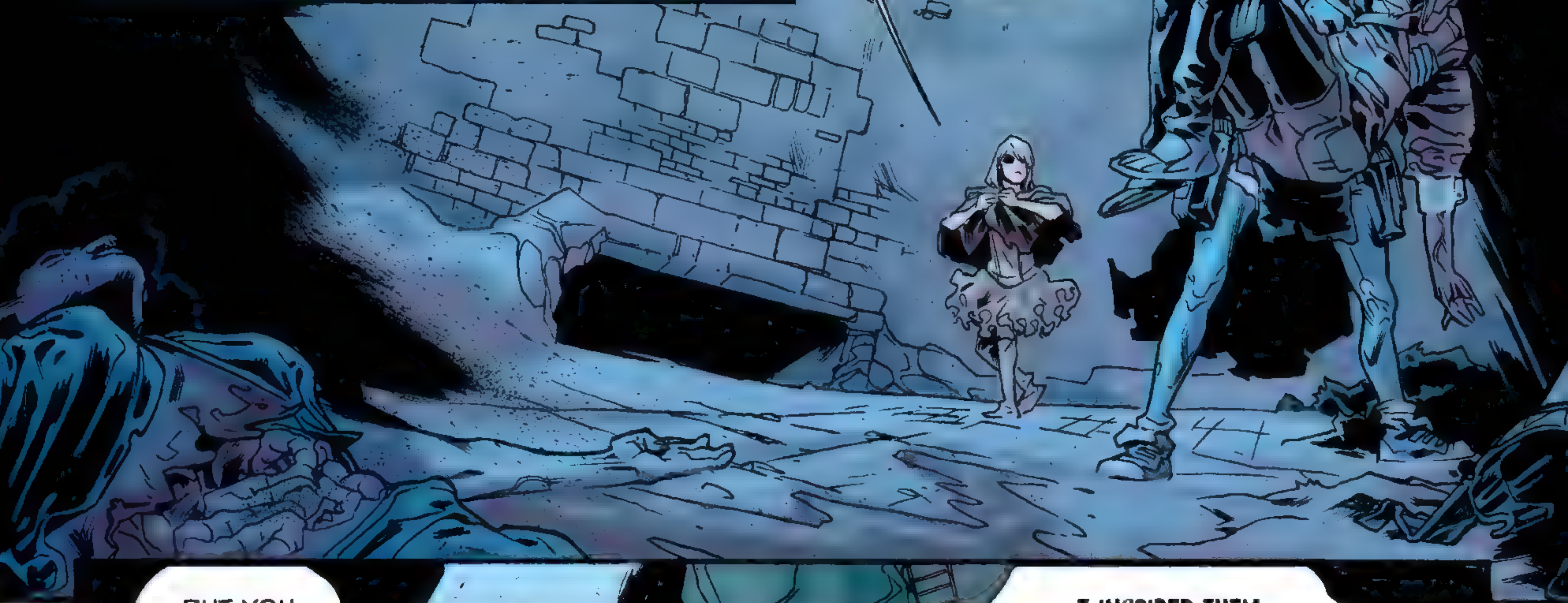




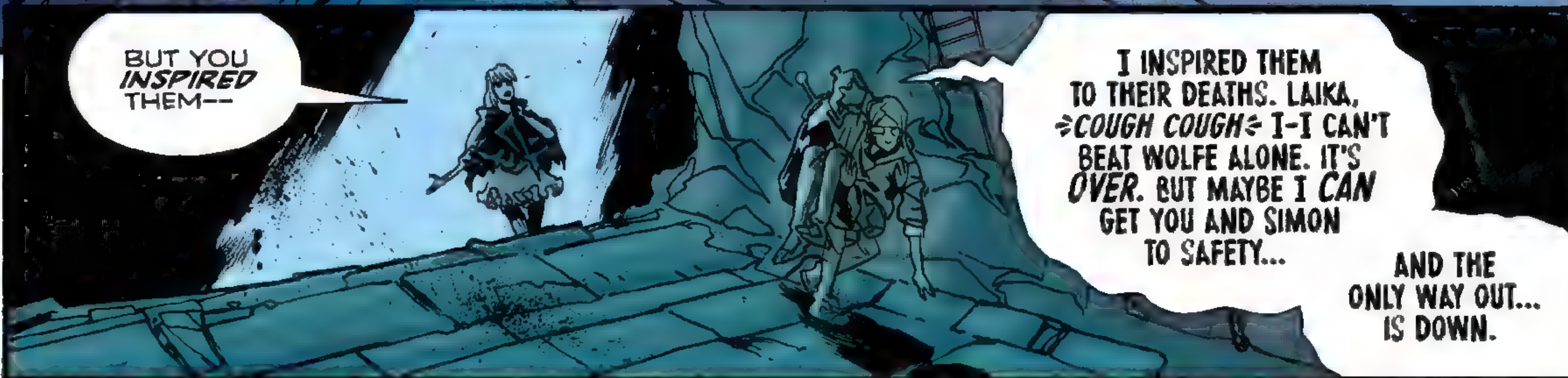
WE'RE JUST
LEAVING?



THE VALKS
ARE DEAD, LAIKA.
SIMON'S BADLY HURT.
≡COUGH≡ AND FOR
WHAT? THEY FOLLOWED
ME, SACRIFICED
THEMSELVES FOR
ME...ALL FOR
NOTHING.



BUT YOU
INSPIRED
THEM--

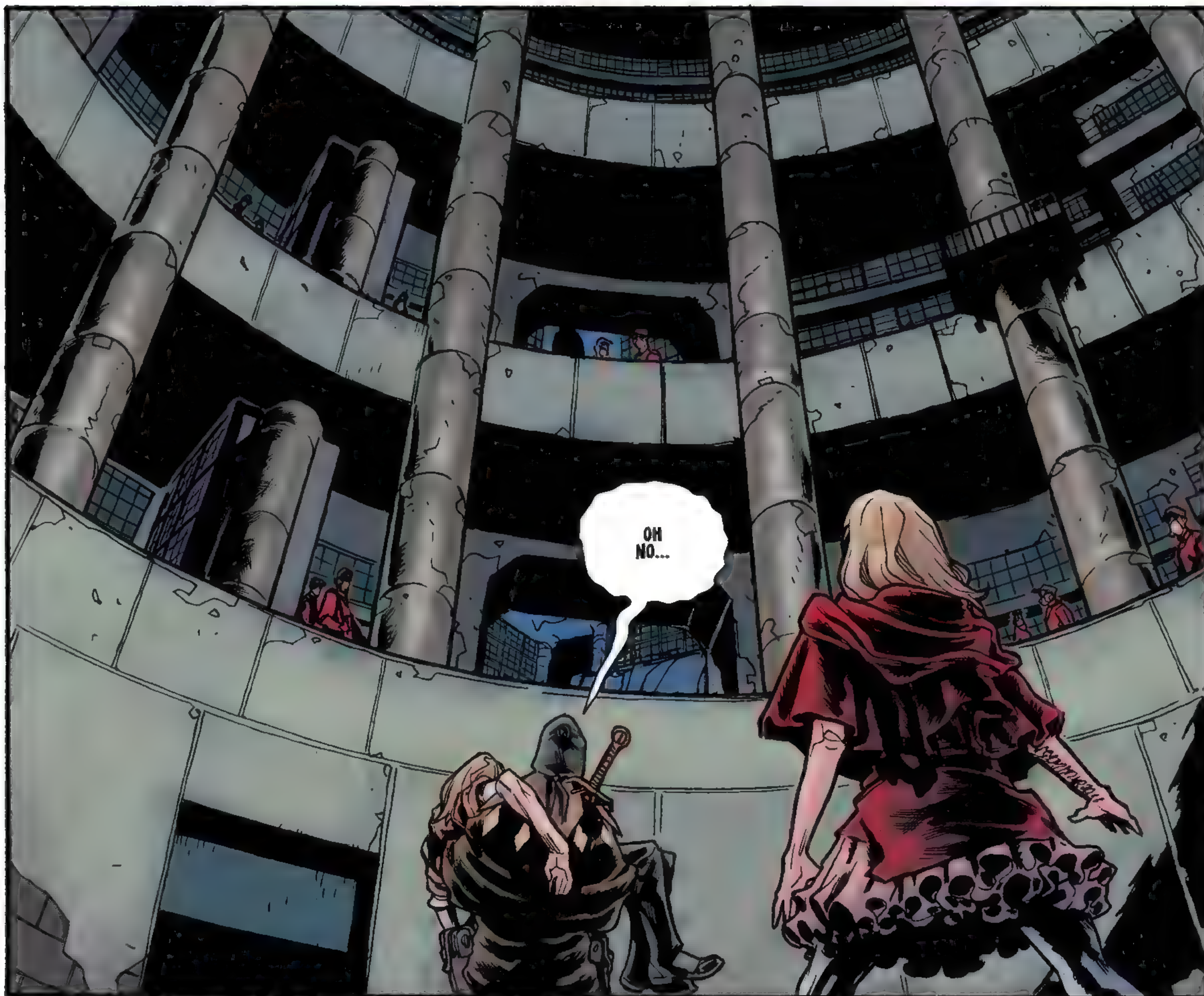


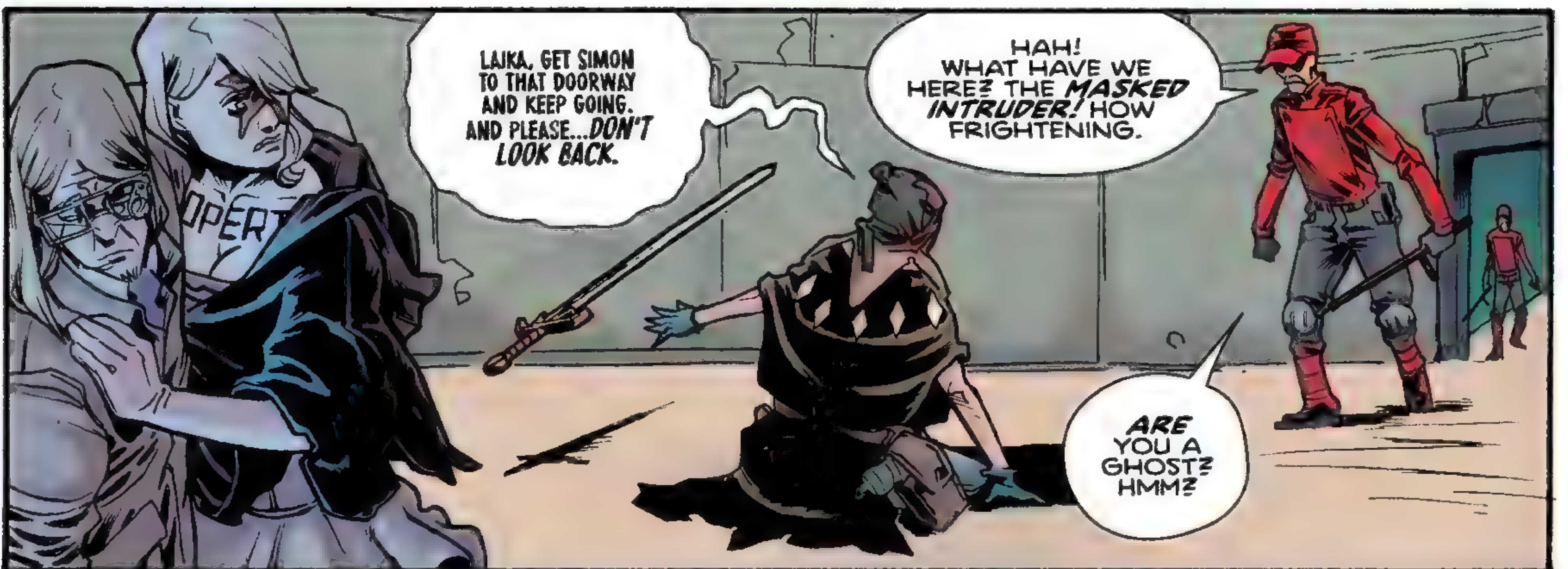
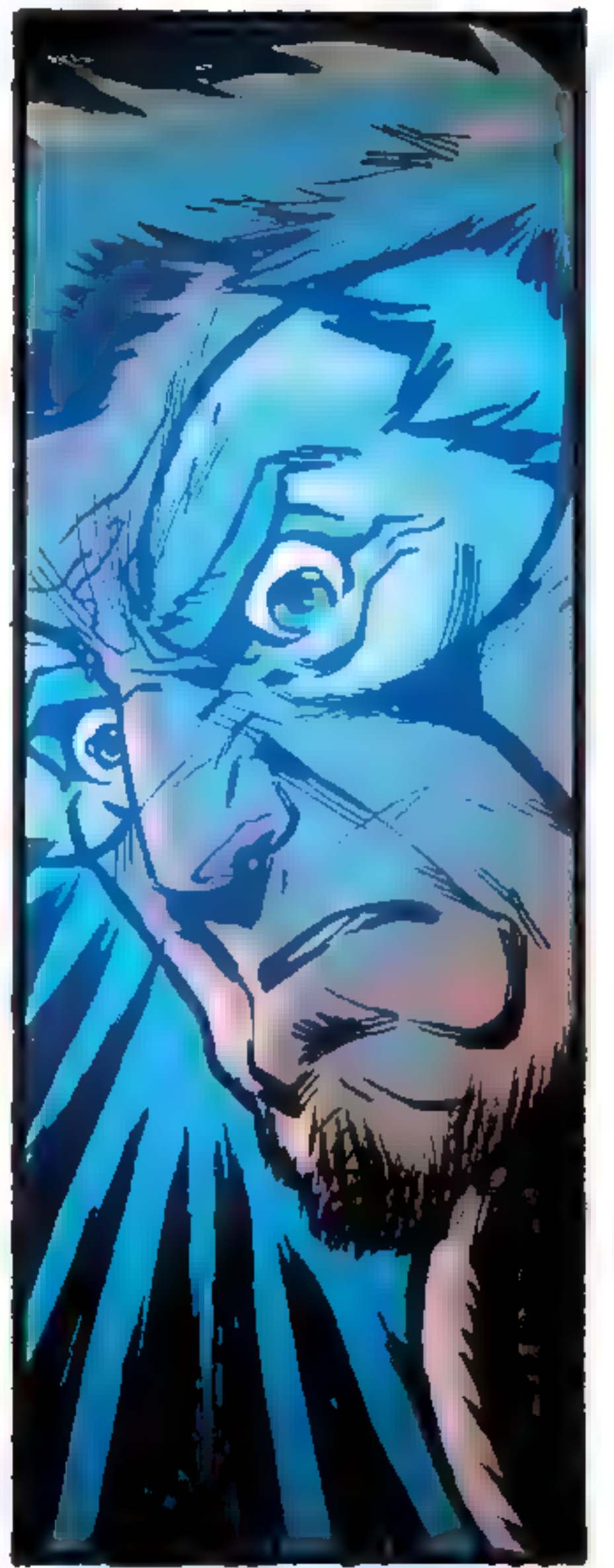
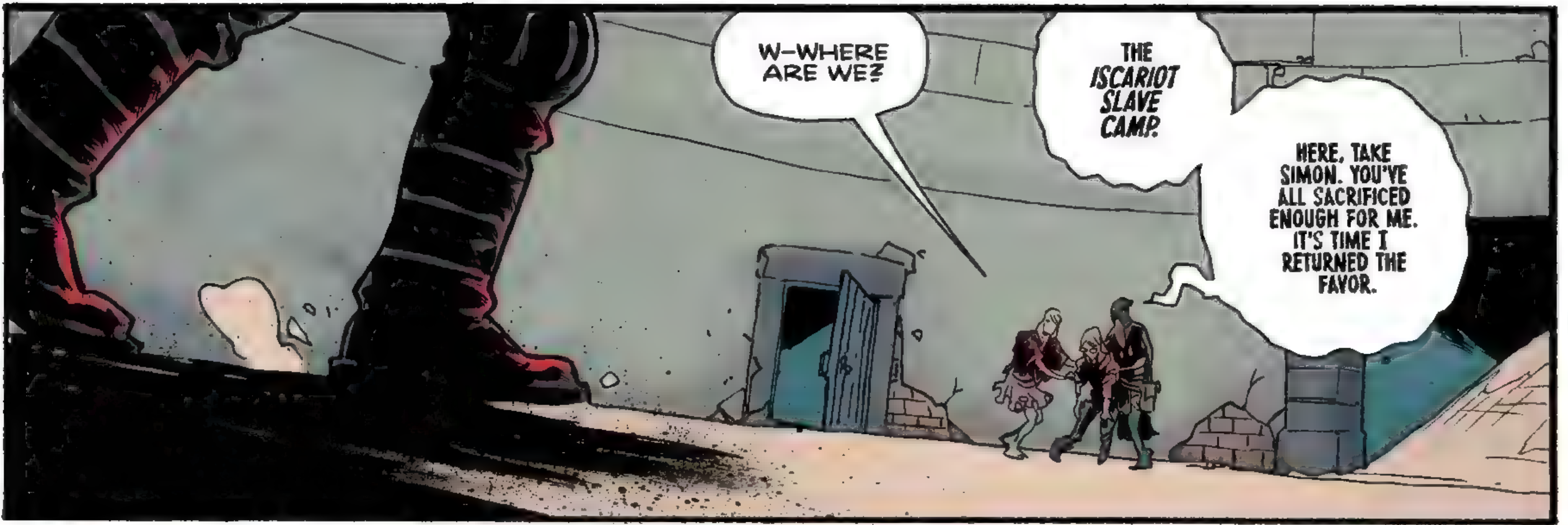
I INSPIRED THEM
TO THEIR DEATHS. LAIKA,
≡COUGH COUGH≡ I-I CAN'T
BEAT WOLFE ALONE. IT'S
OVER. BUT MAYBE I CAN
GET YOU AND SIMON
TO SAFETY...

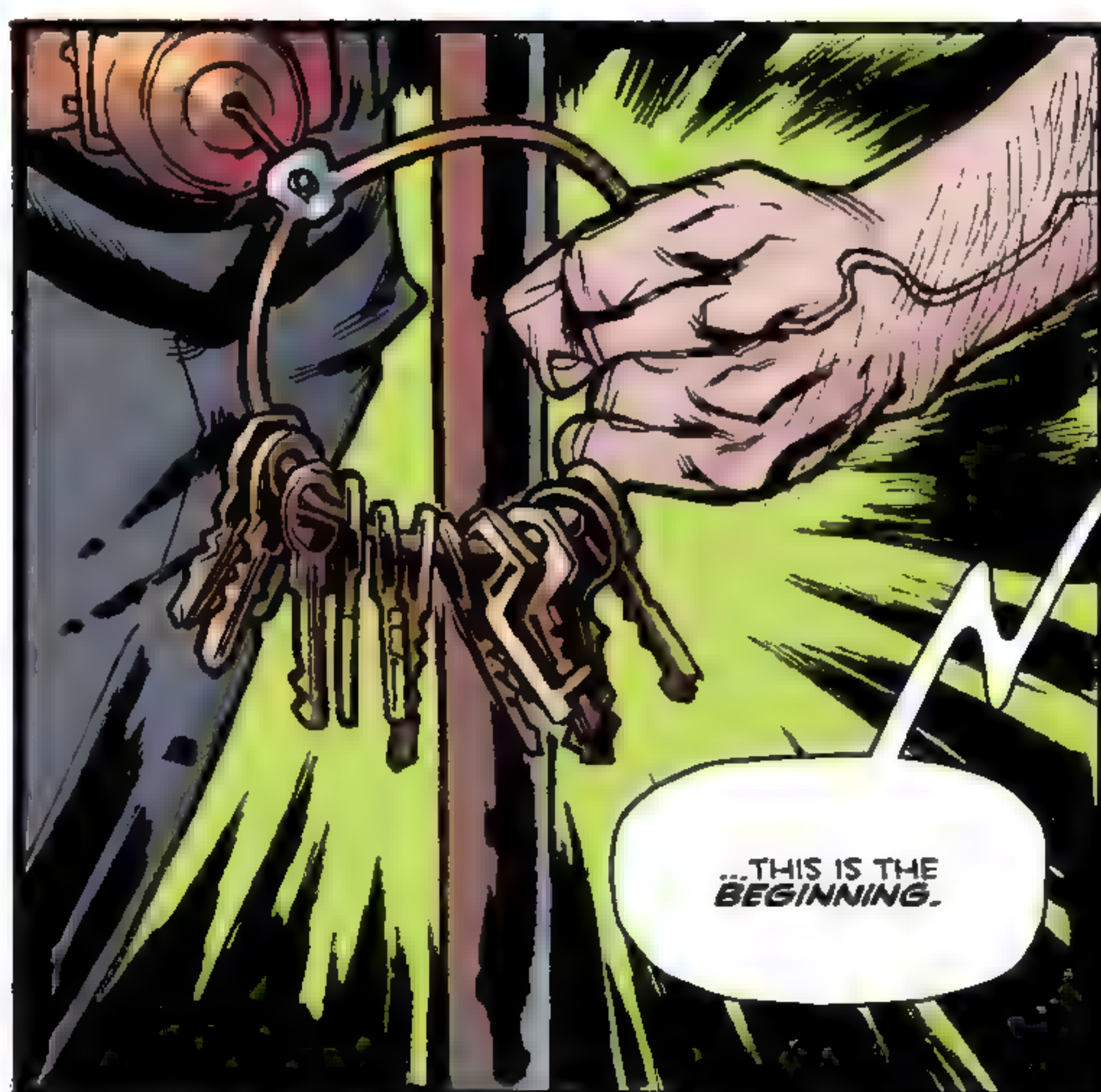
AND THE
ONLY WAY OUT...
IS DOWN.



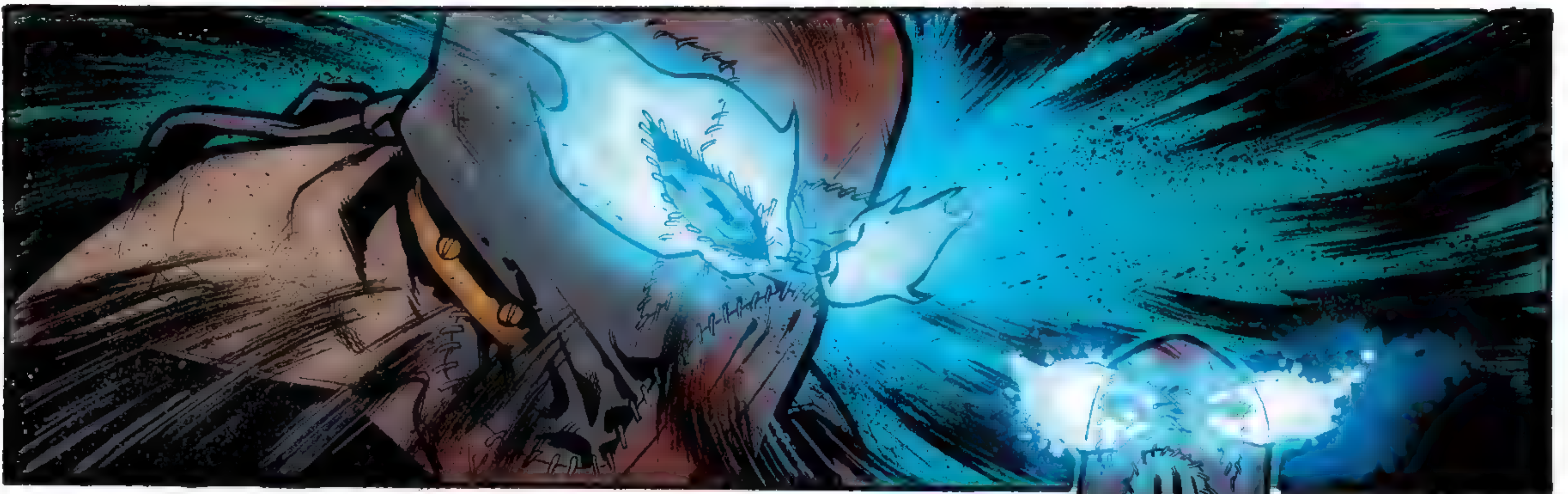


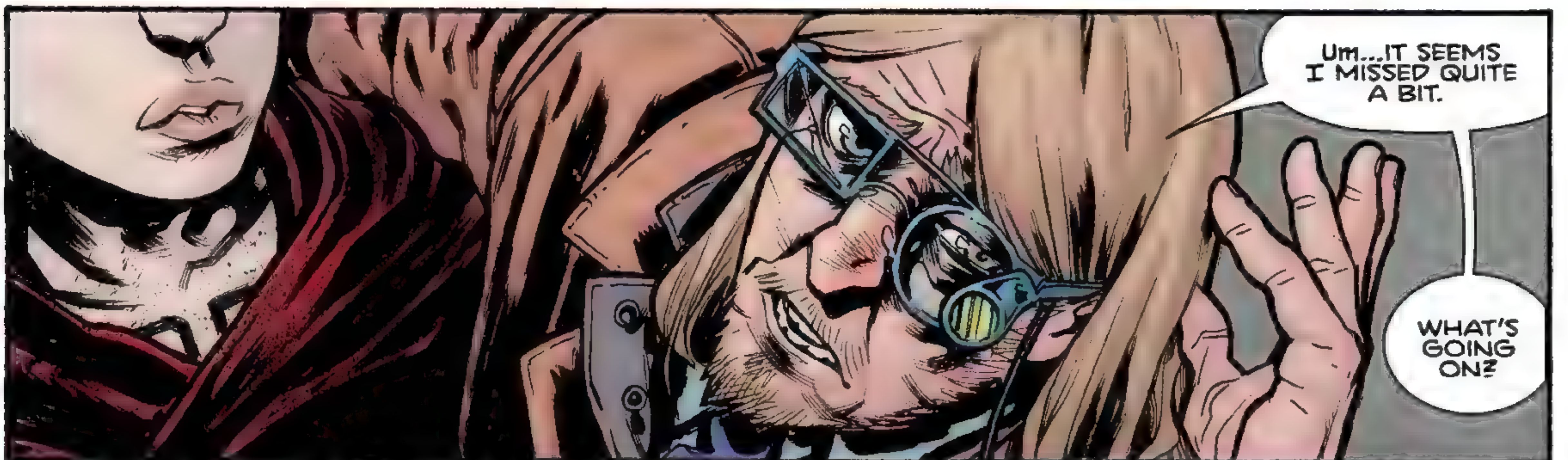


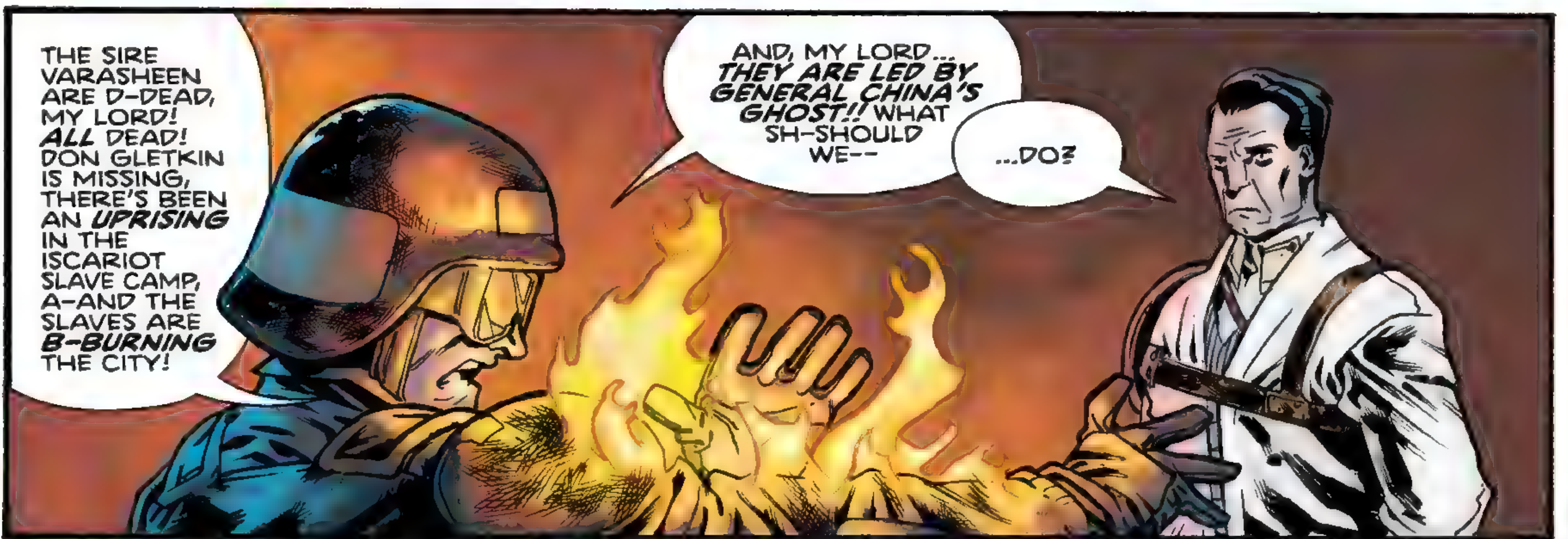














...ESPECIALLY
**SUPERSTITIOUS
IMBECILES** LIKE
YOU!



PENUEL IS
FORFEIT. PREPARE
**OPERATION
PHOENIX!** GO
TO YOUR **FINAL
STATIONS!**

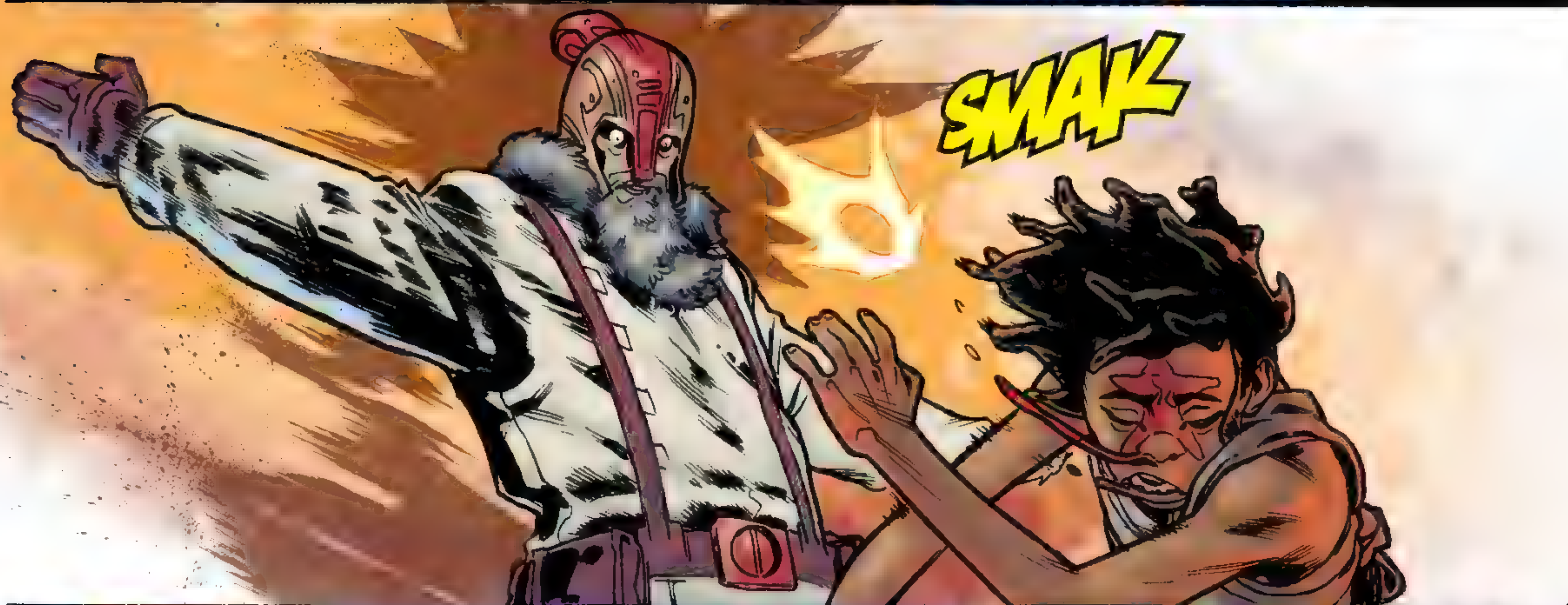


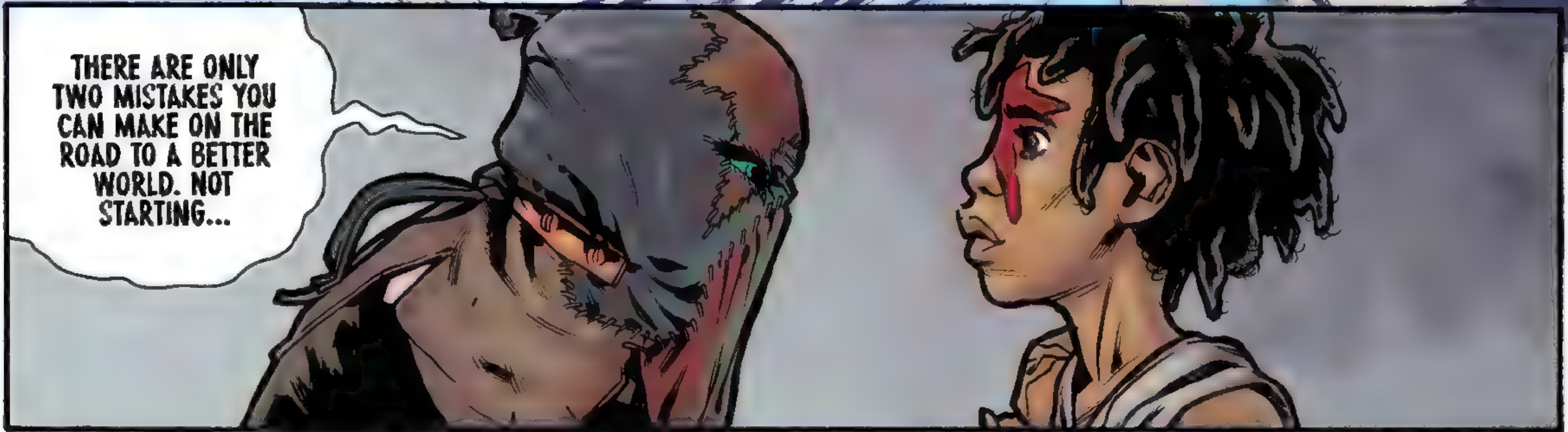
AND...
RELEASE THE
**CANNIBAL
GUARDS.**

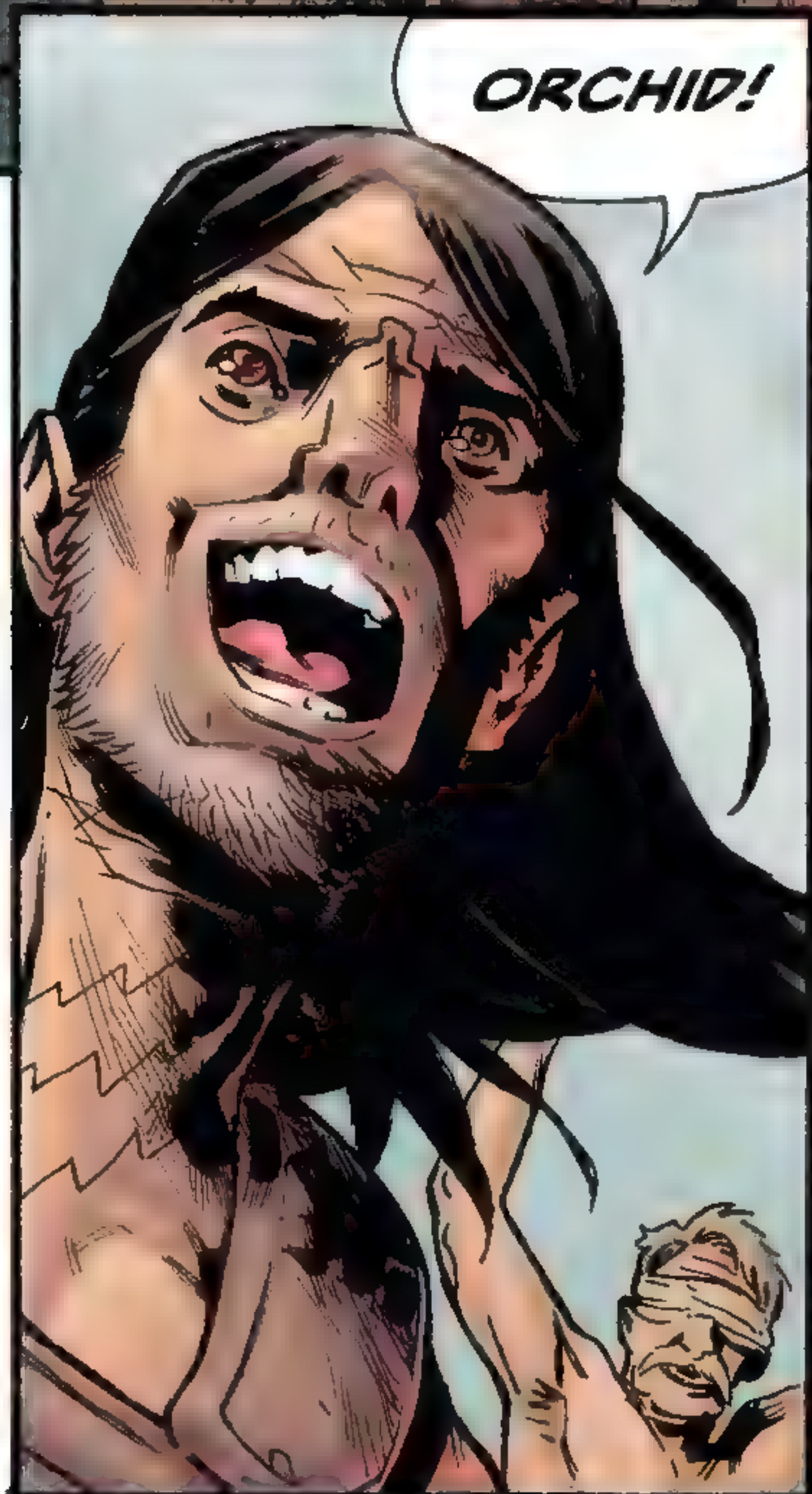


I WILL NO
LONGER SIT IN THE
TOWERS OF PENUEL--
I WILL BRING THE
TOWERS OF PENUEL
TO OUR ENEMIES!
**UNTETHER THE
MOTHER
SPIDERS!**

WHAT THESE
BRIDGE SCUM AND
THEIR "GHOSTLY"
LEADER DON'T
KNOW IS... **THIS
FORTRESS IS A
WEAPON.**







ORCHID!

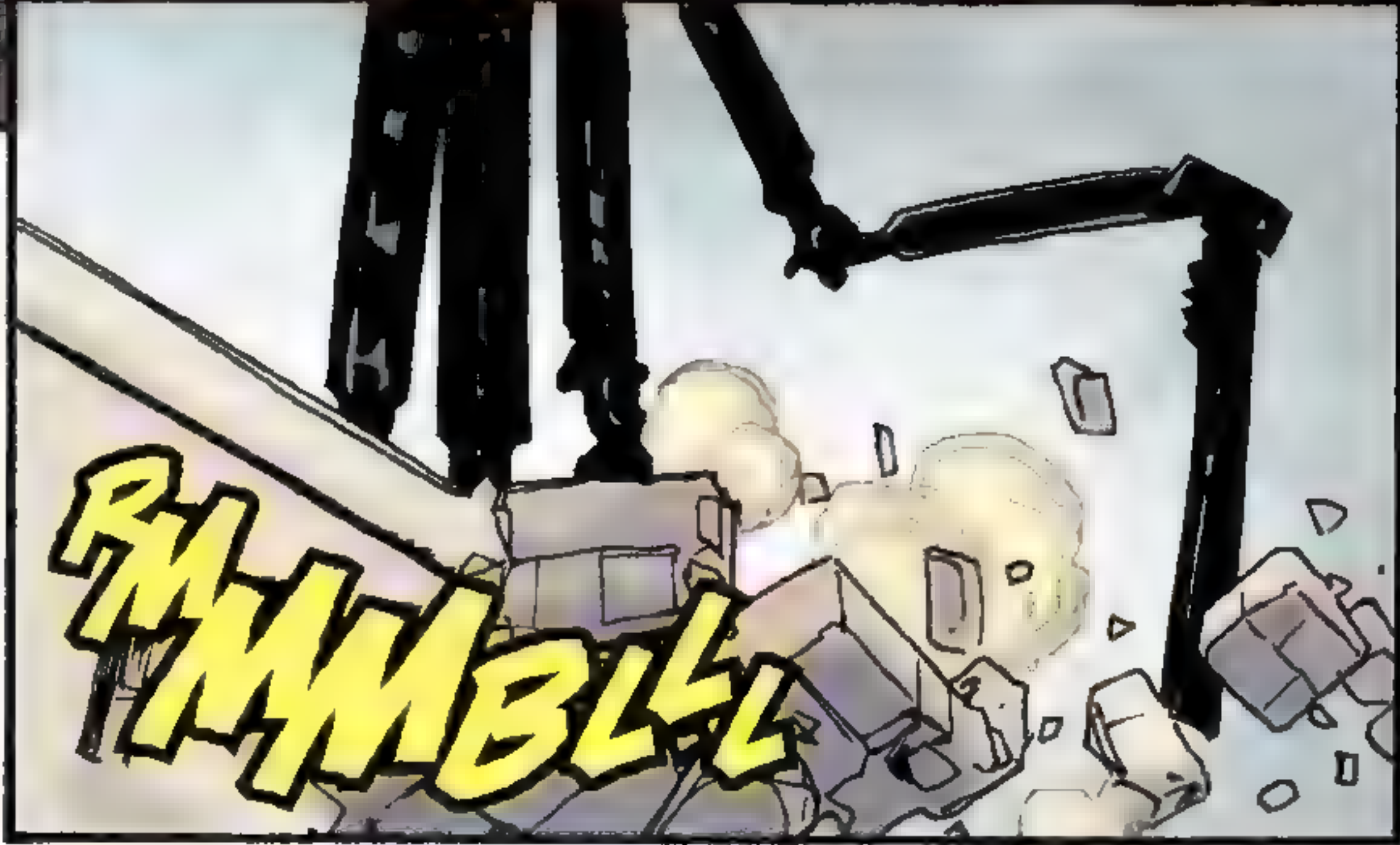


**WOLFE'S
NOT DEAD...**

**...BUT
NEITHER
ARE THE
BRIDGE
PEOPLE!**



**HOPE HAS
RETURNED!
FIGHT!**





LET'S
BRING THIS
MATTER TO A
CONCLUSION,
SHALL WE?

SHOOOM



SHOOOM
SHOOOM
SHOOOM

SHOOOM SHOOOM SHOOOM



YES.

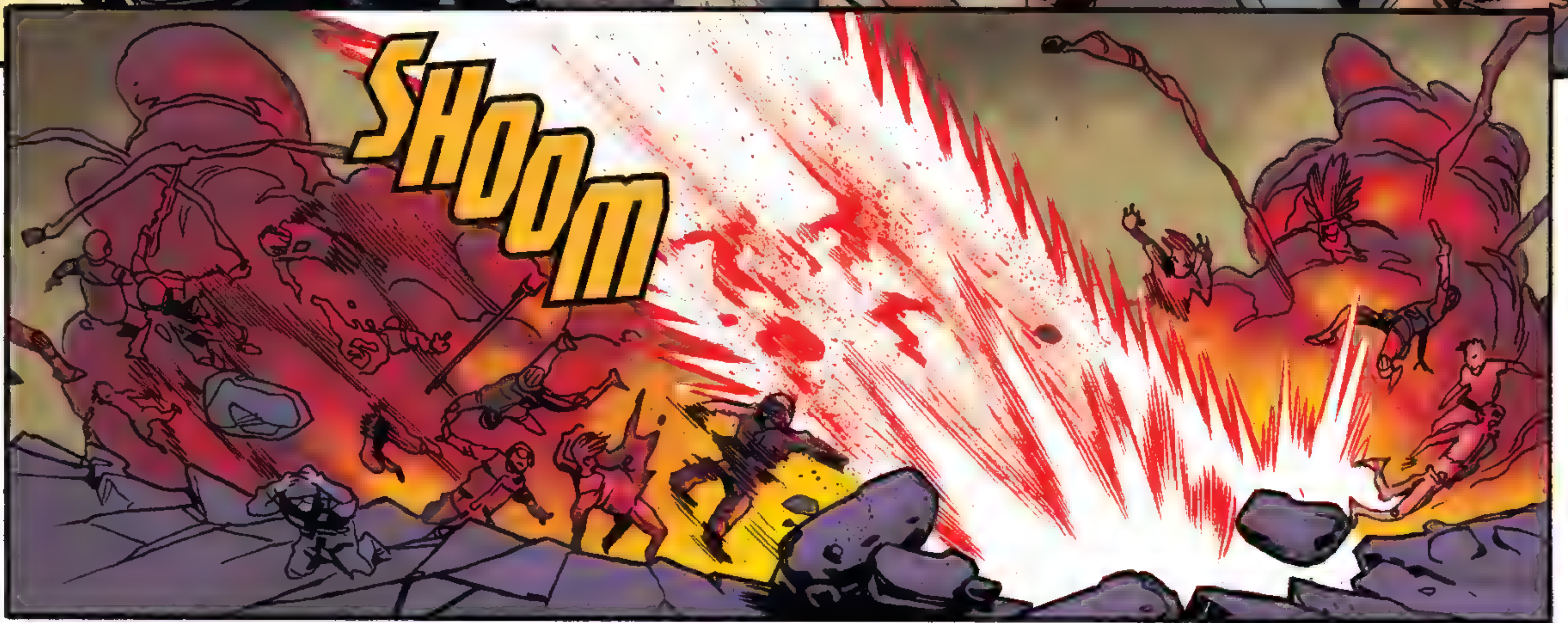
LET'S.

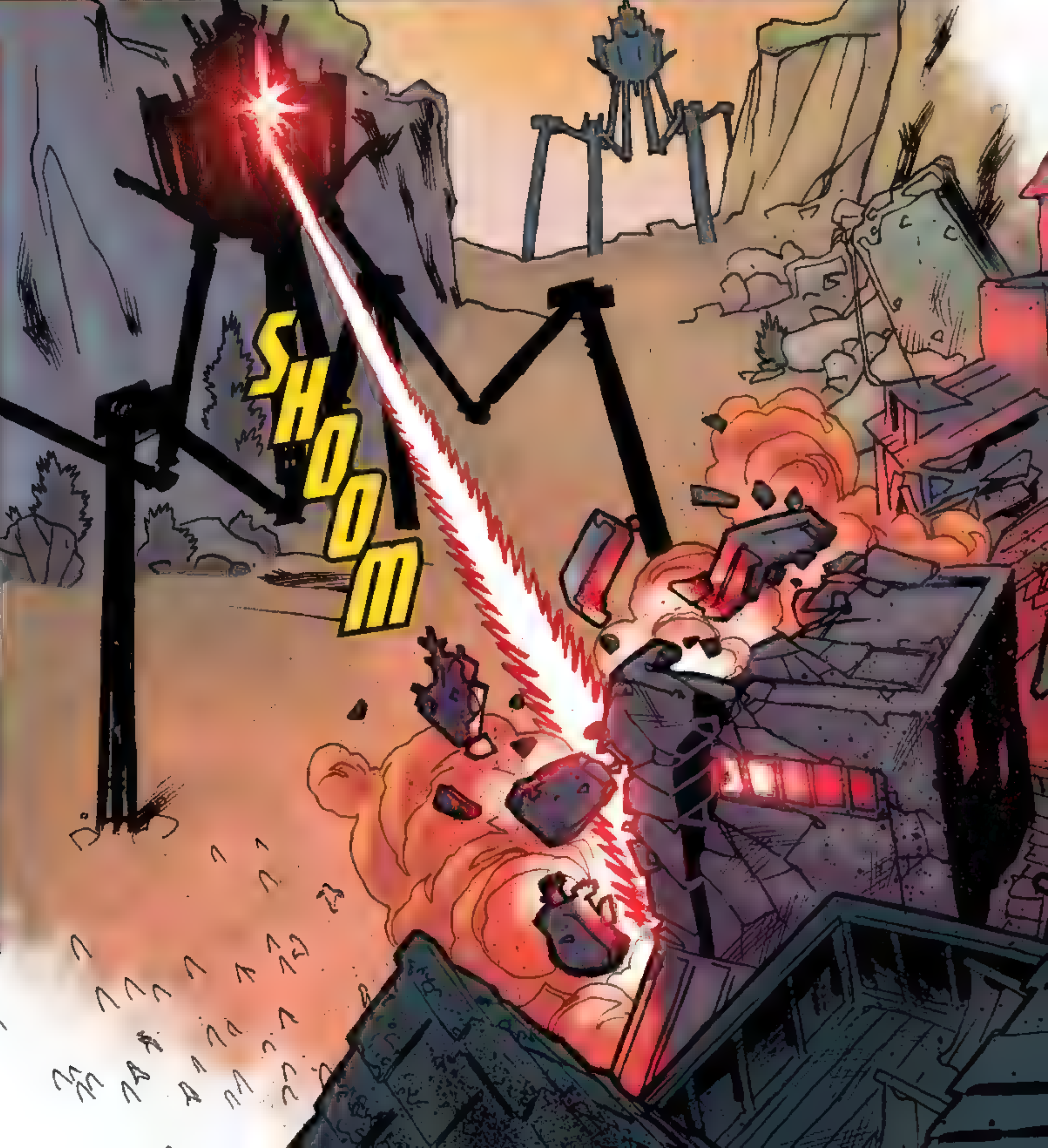




KNOW YOUR ROLE

Handwritten signature or mark.







A THOUSAND VOICES IN MY HEAD STEEL MY WILL.



A THOUSAND ARMS...

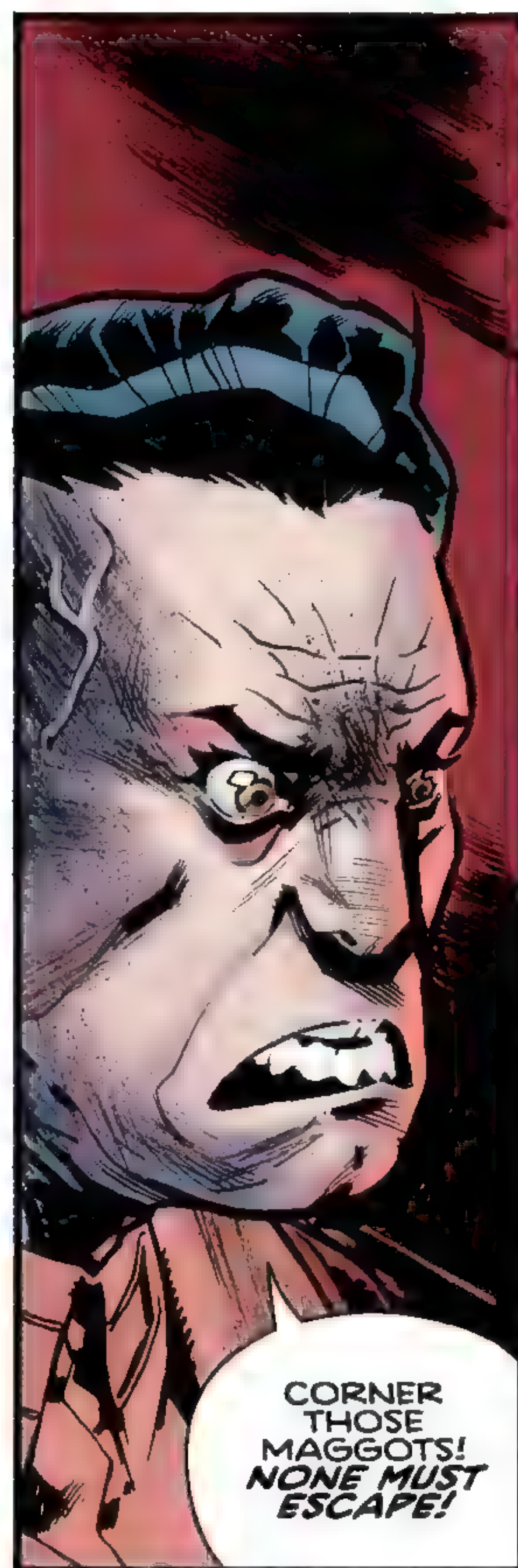
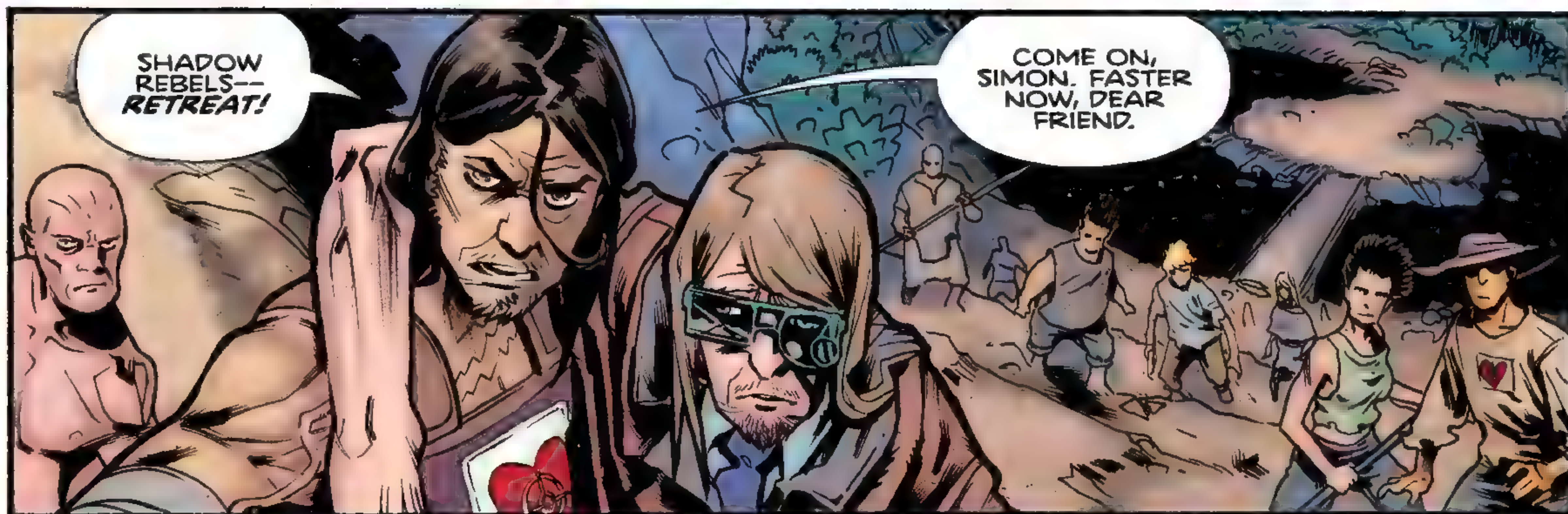
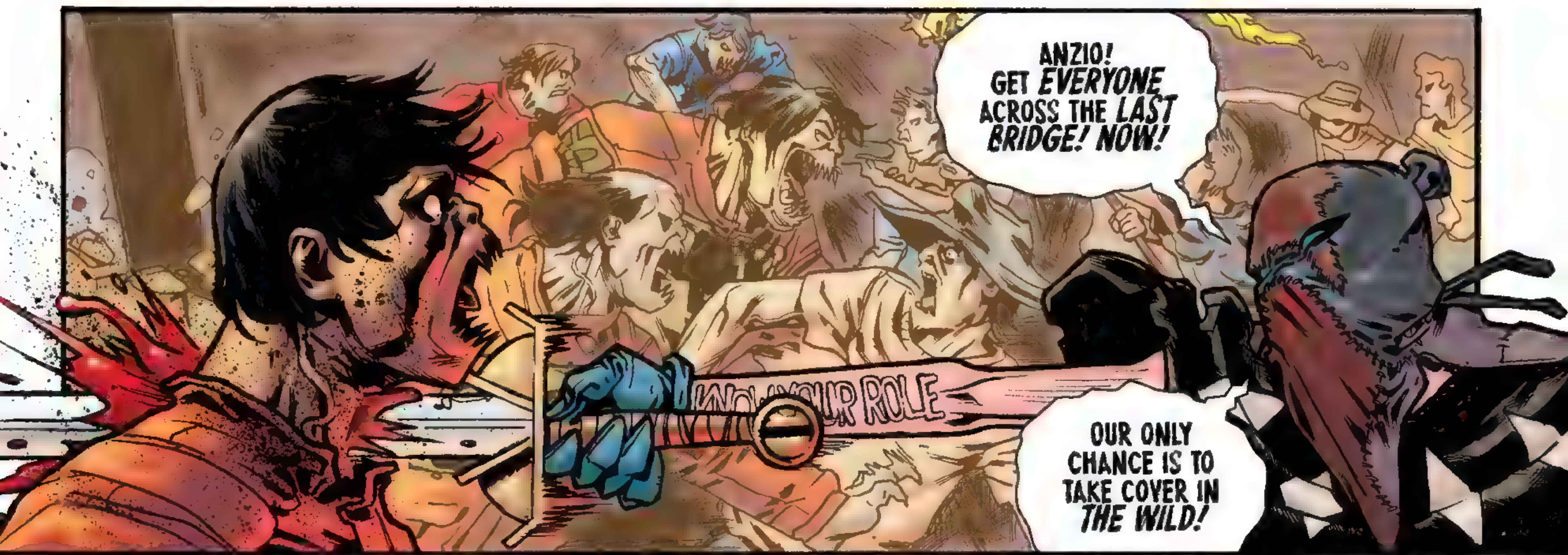


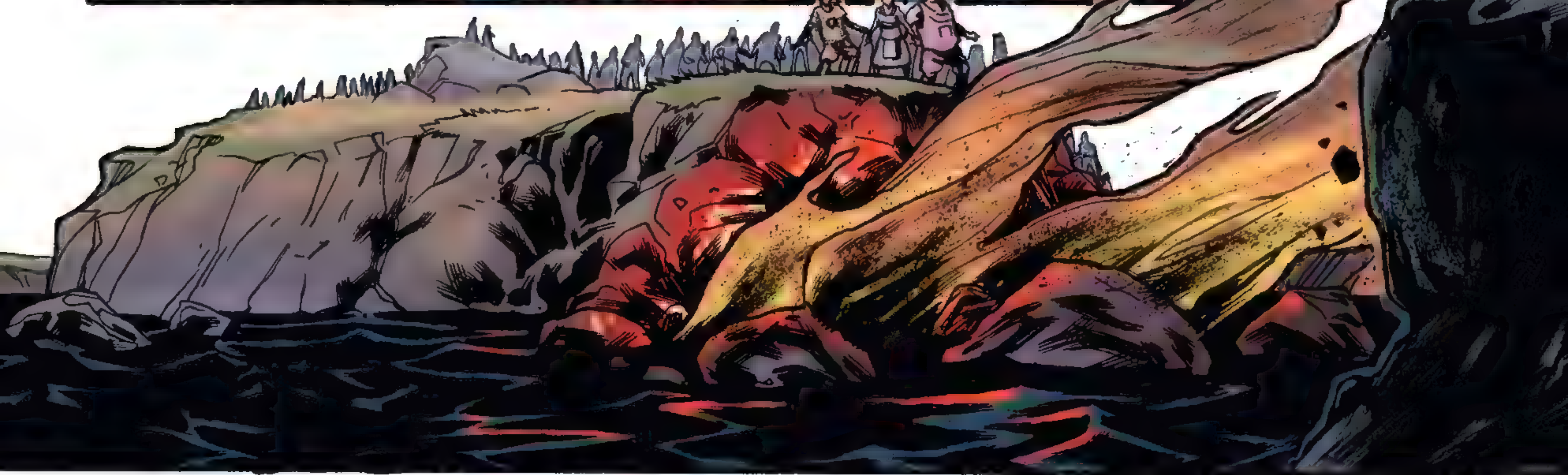
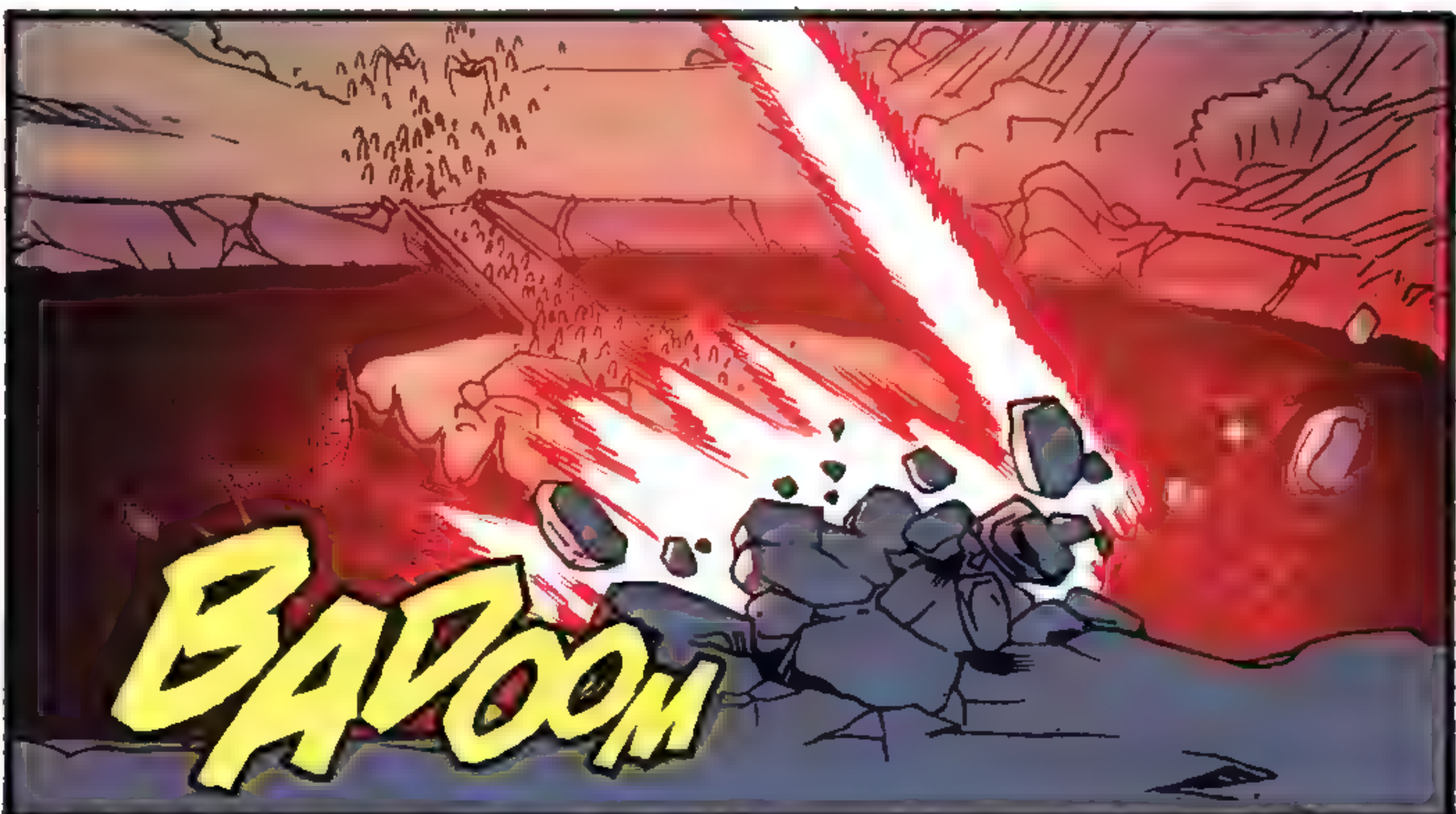
...SWING MY SWORD.

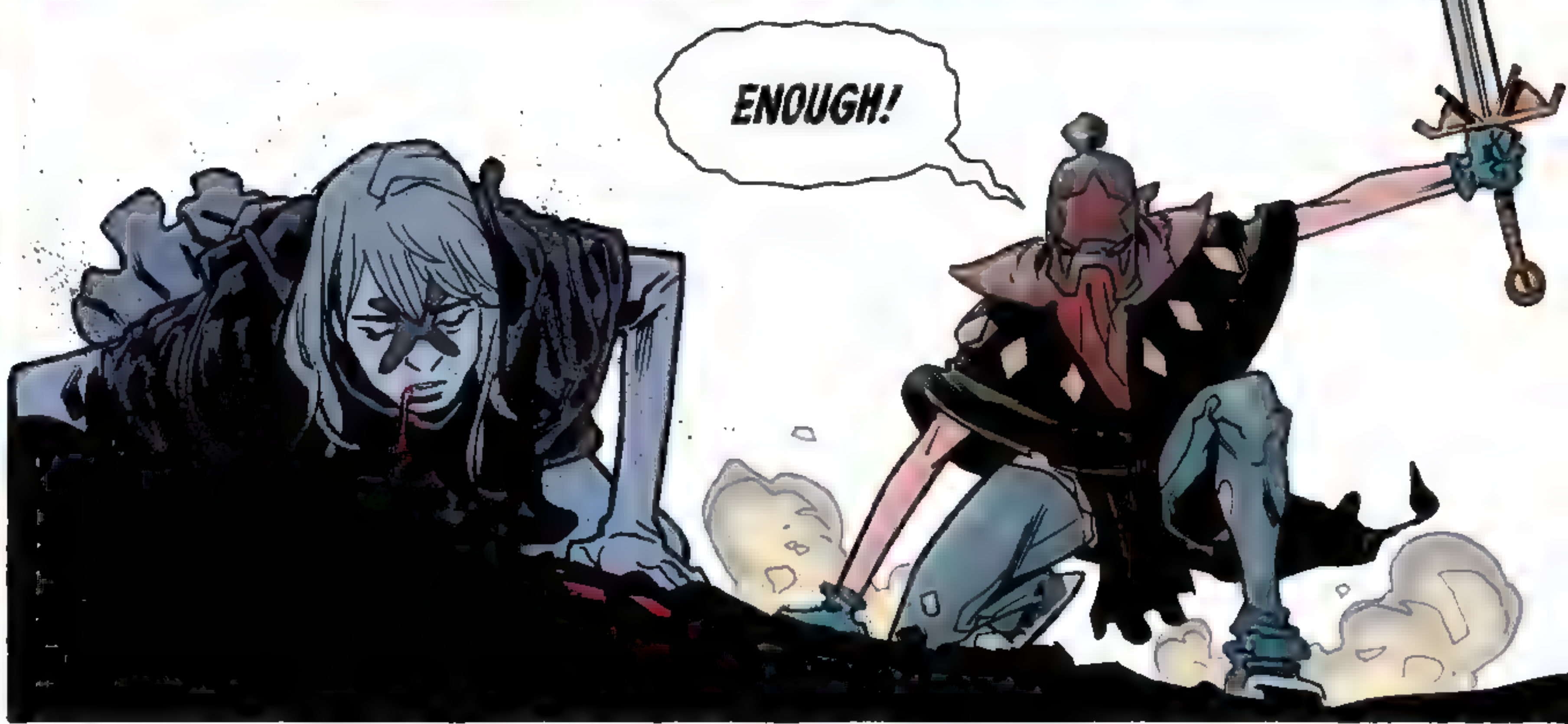
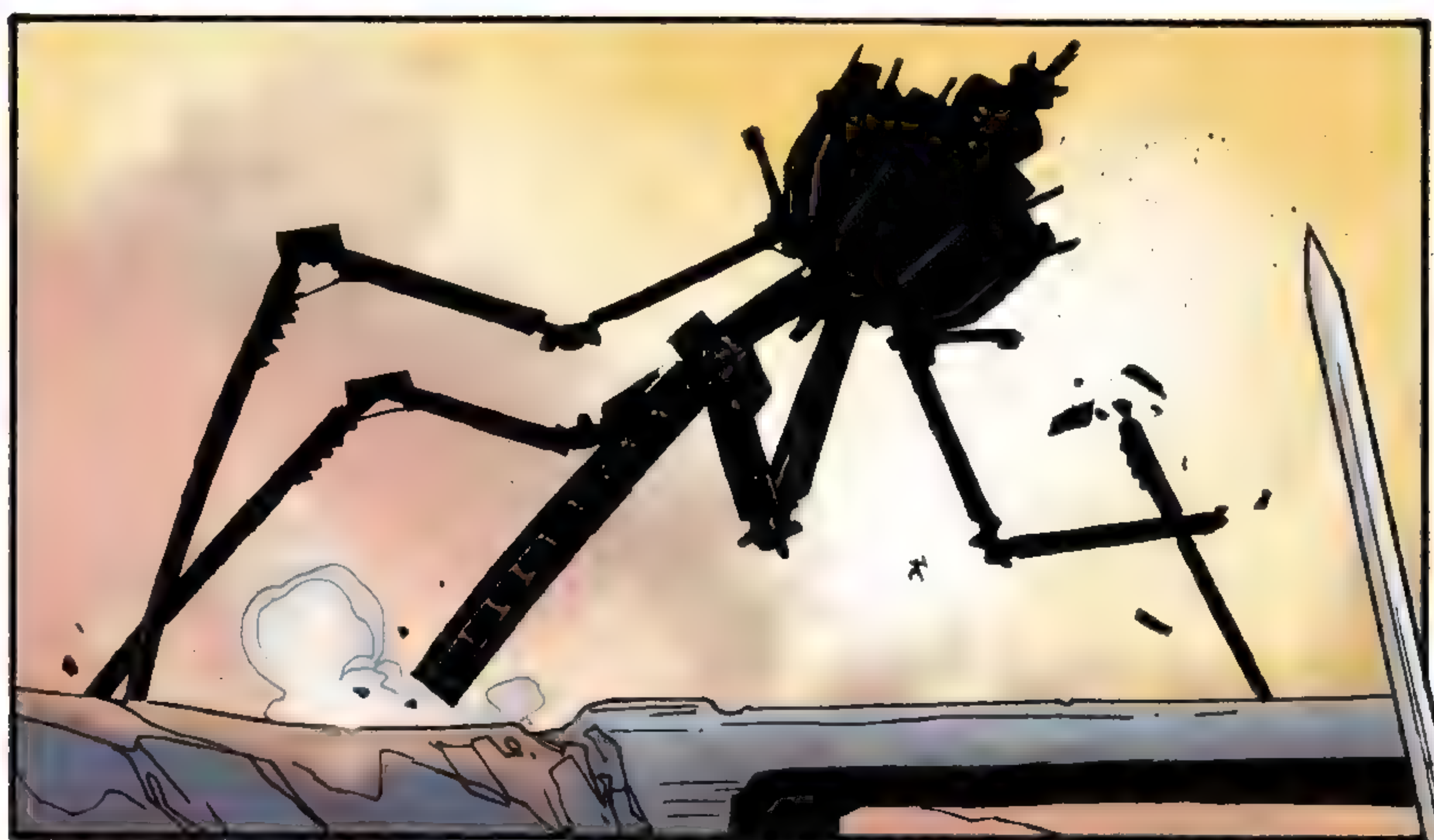
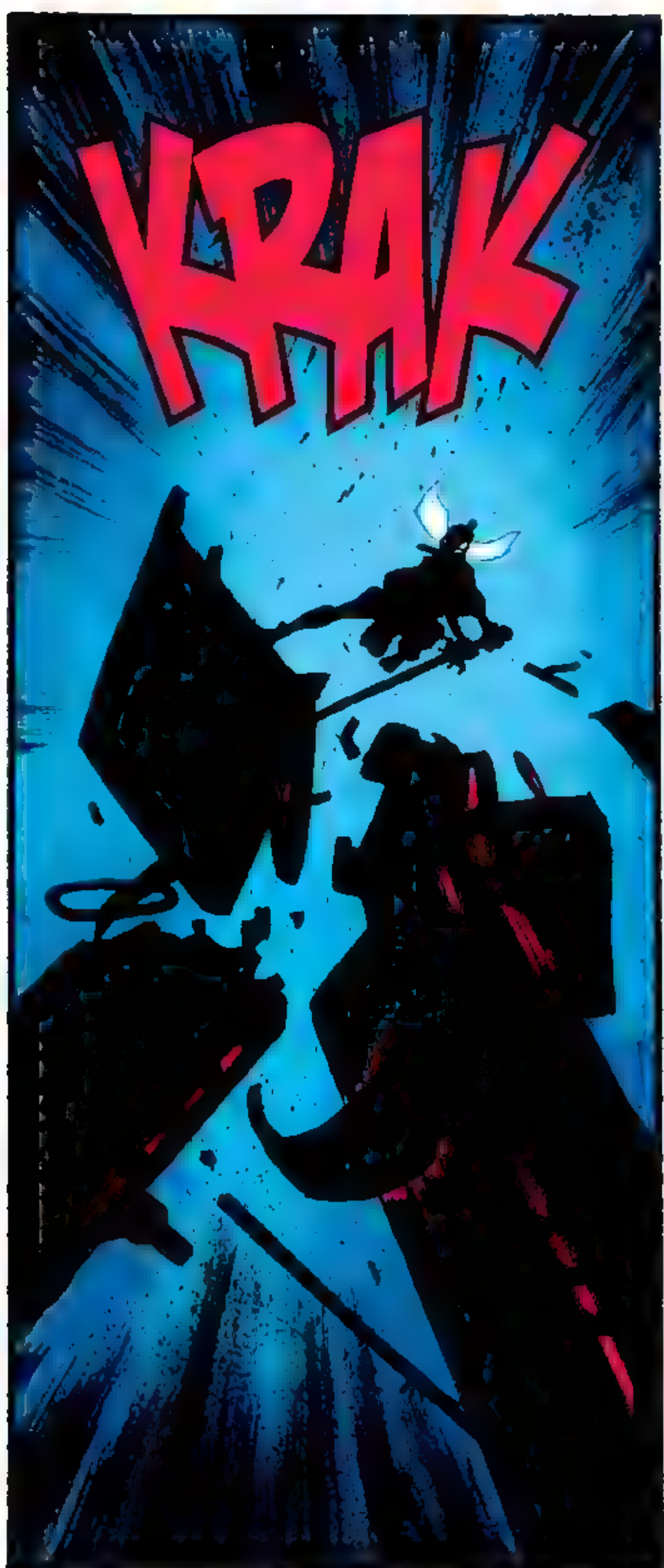
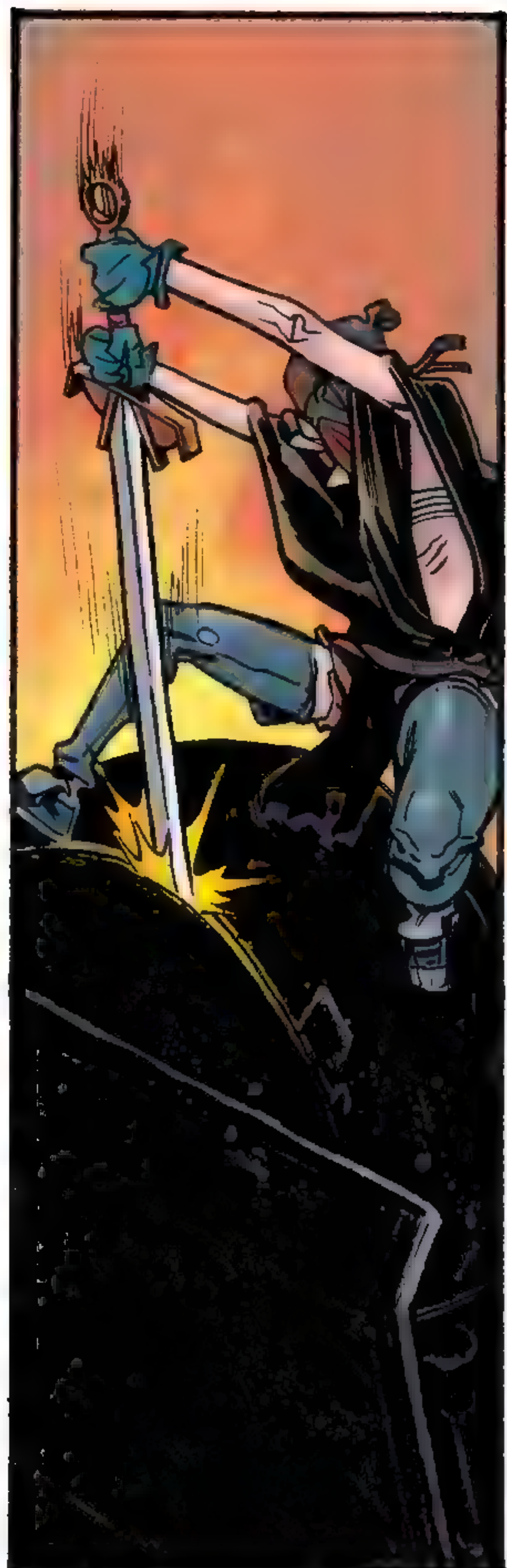
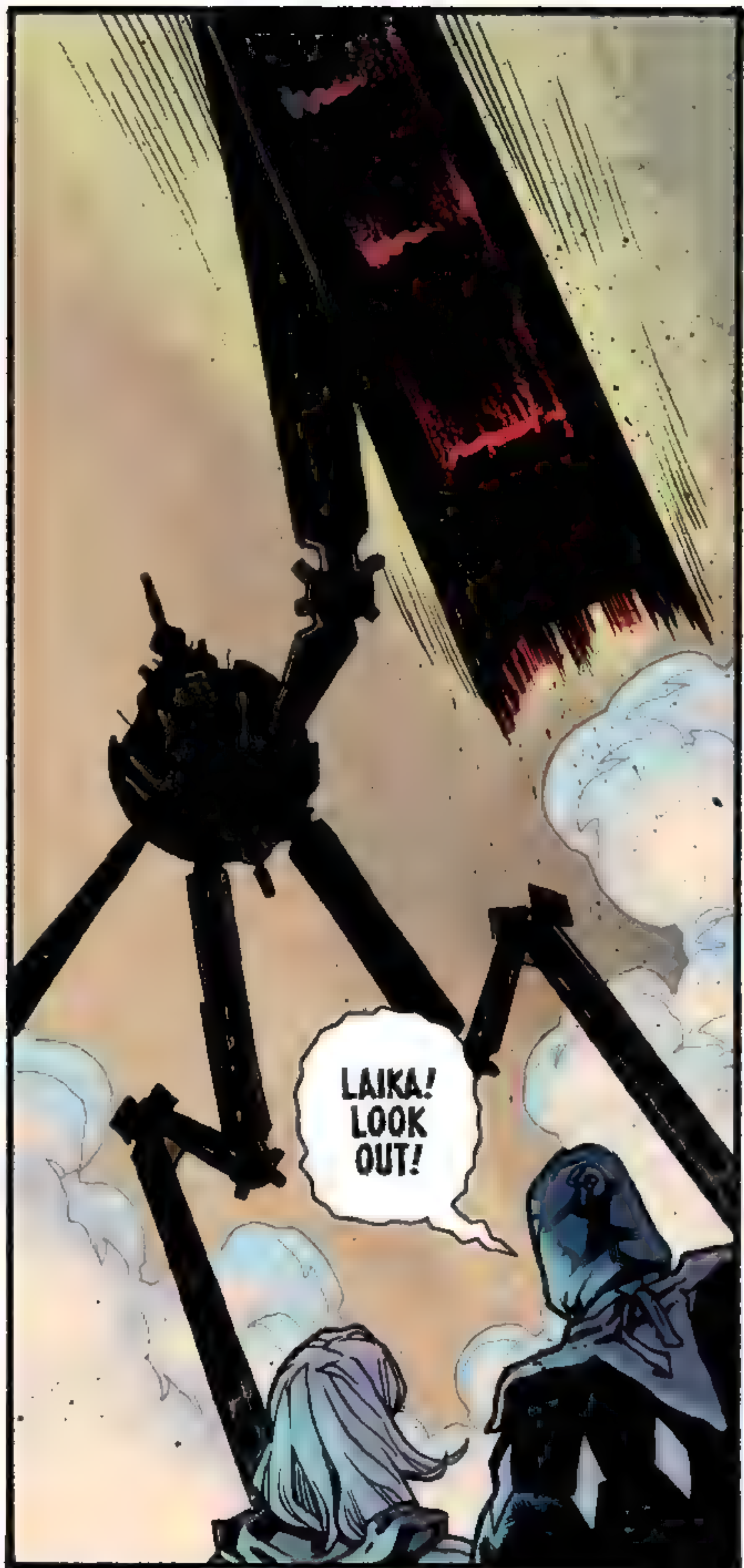


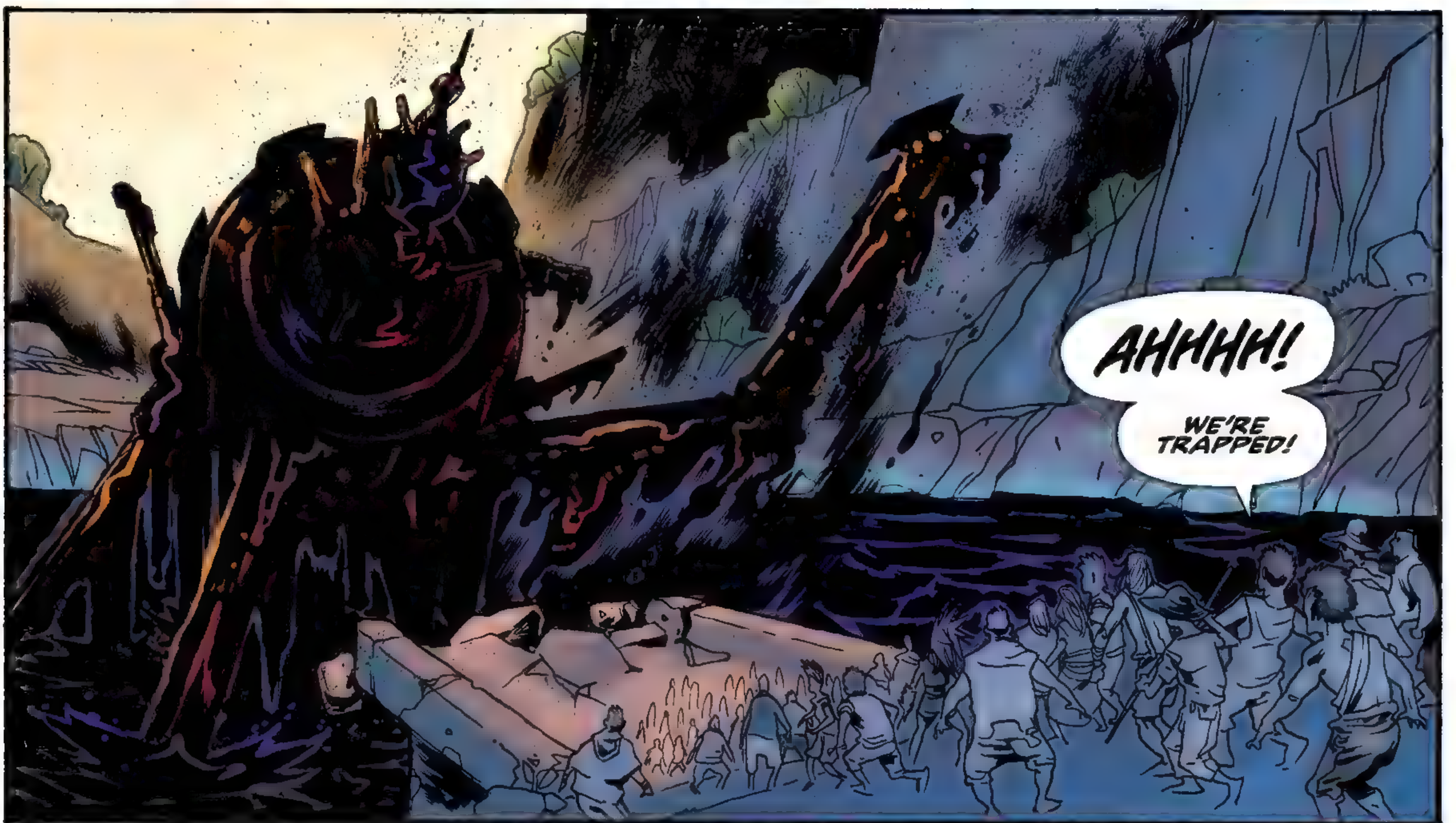
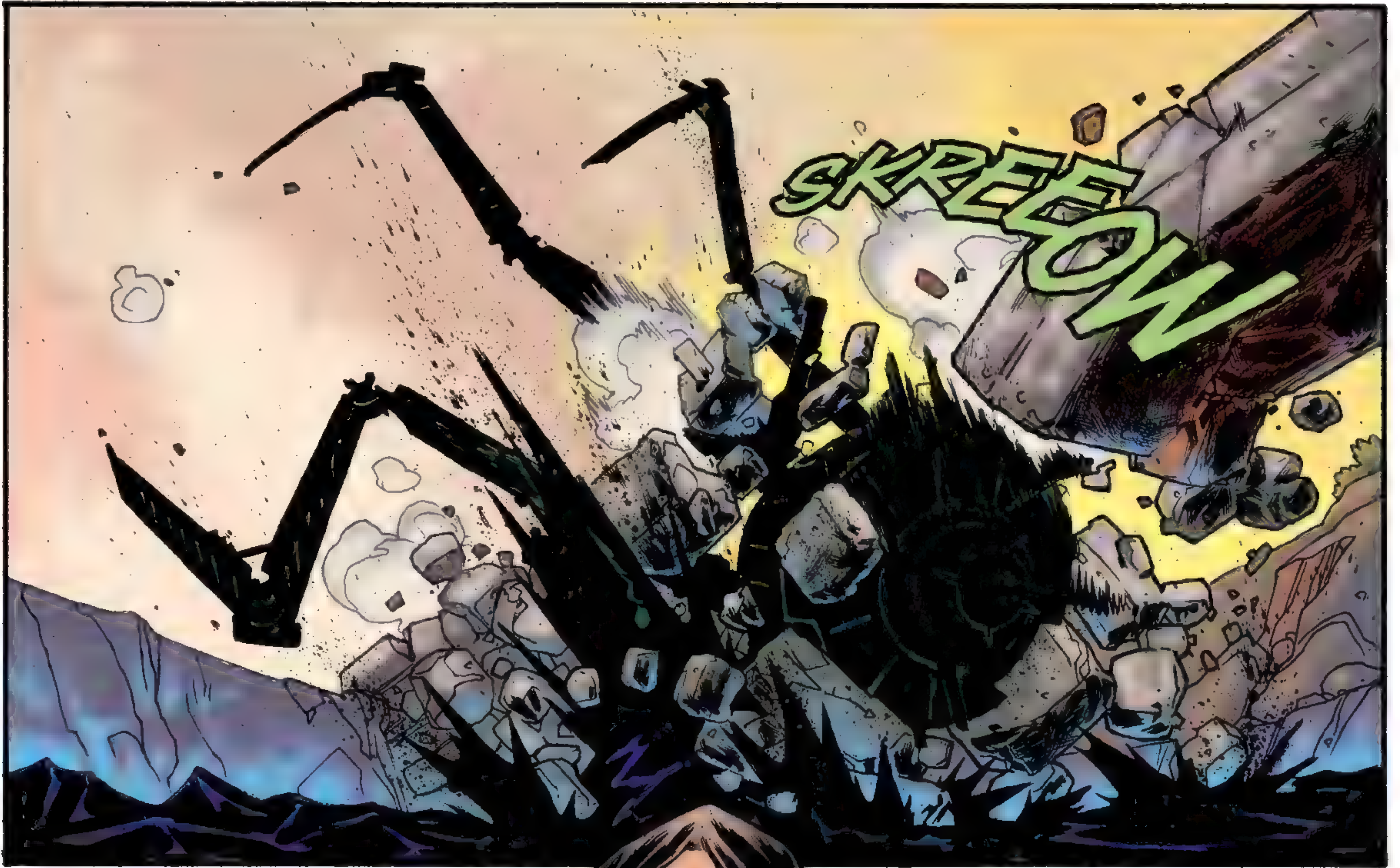
HEEN-HEEN-NEH-NEH-NEH

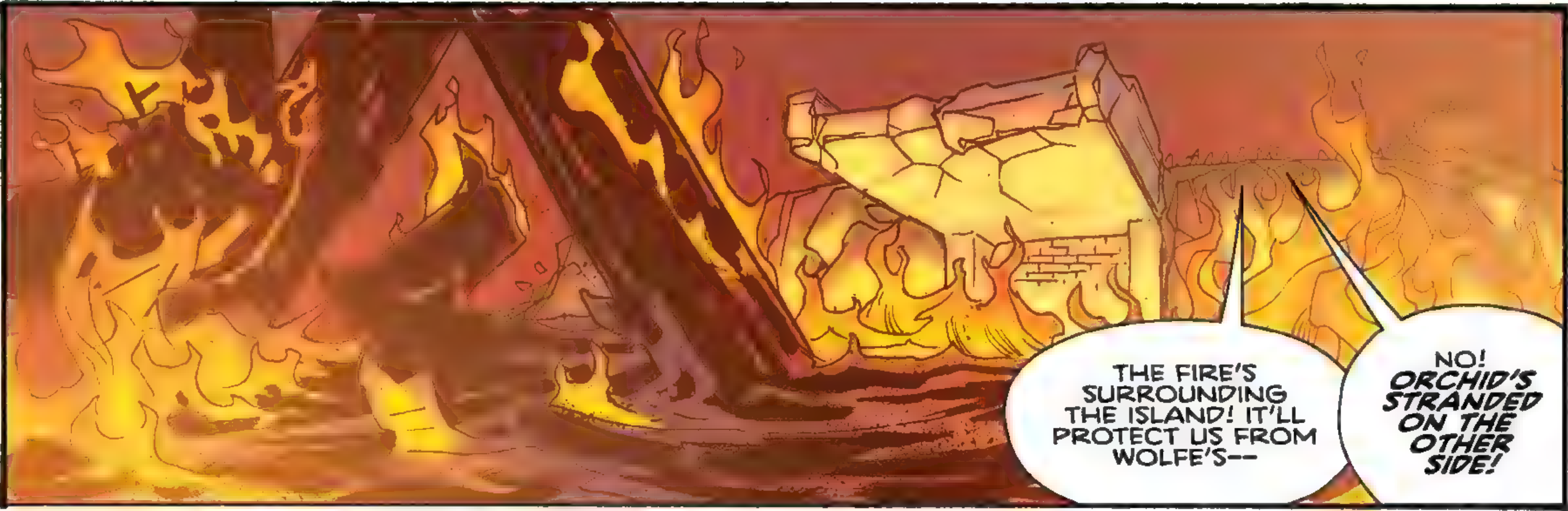
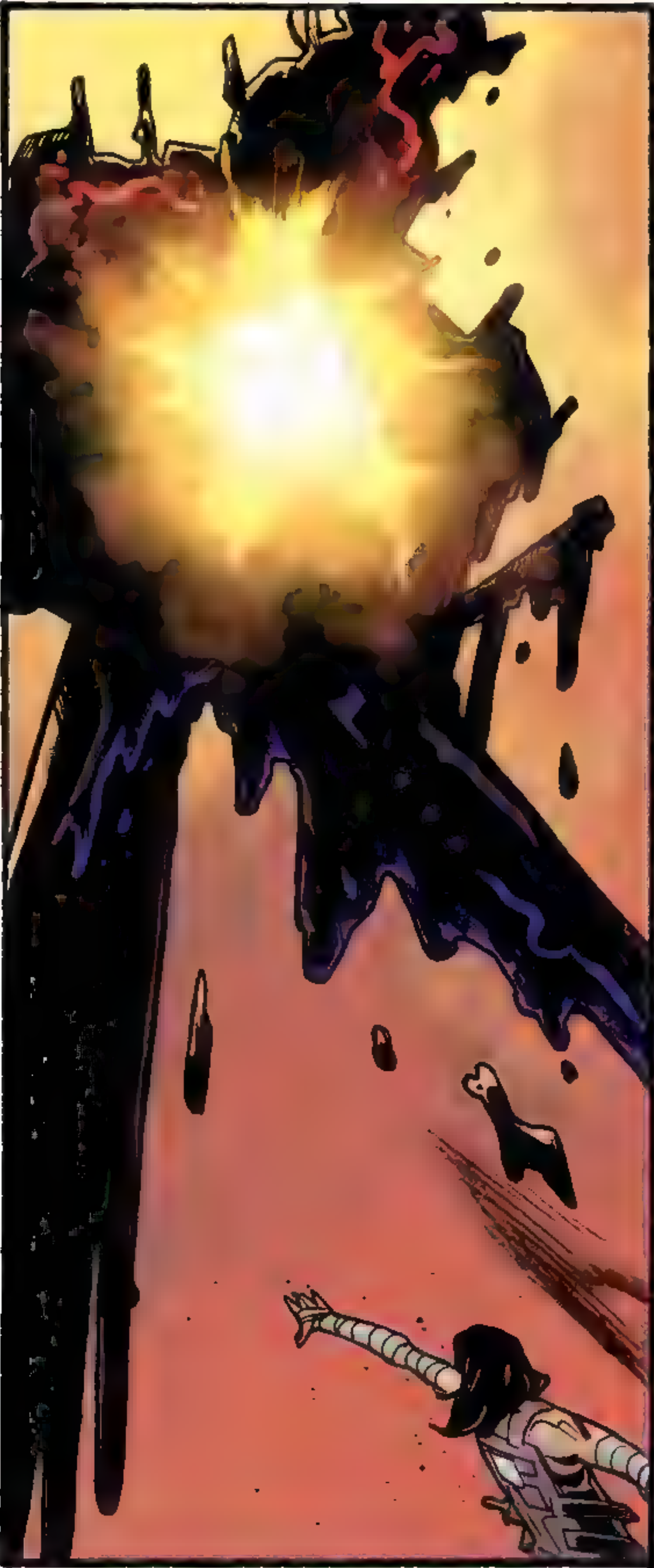
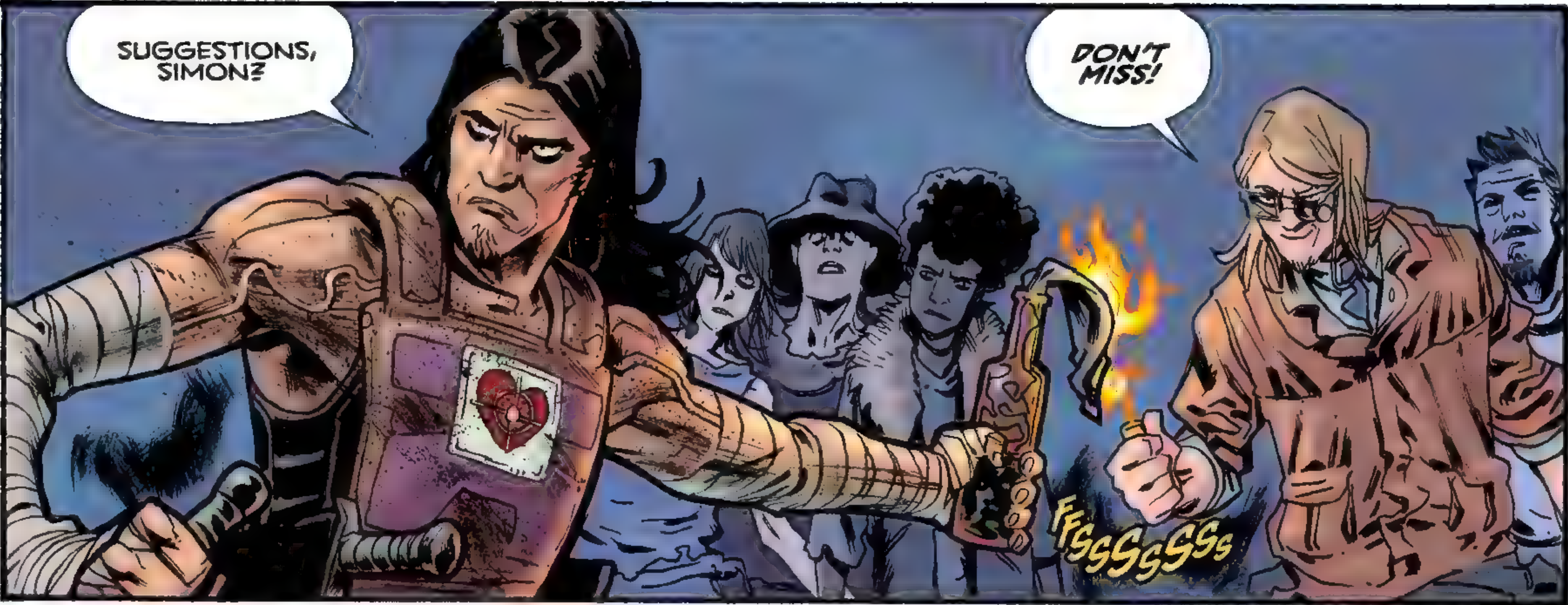
BUT THERE ARE JUST TOO MANY OF THEM.

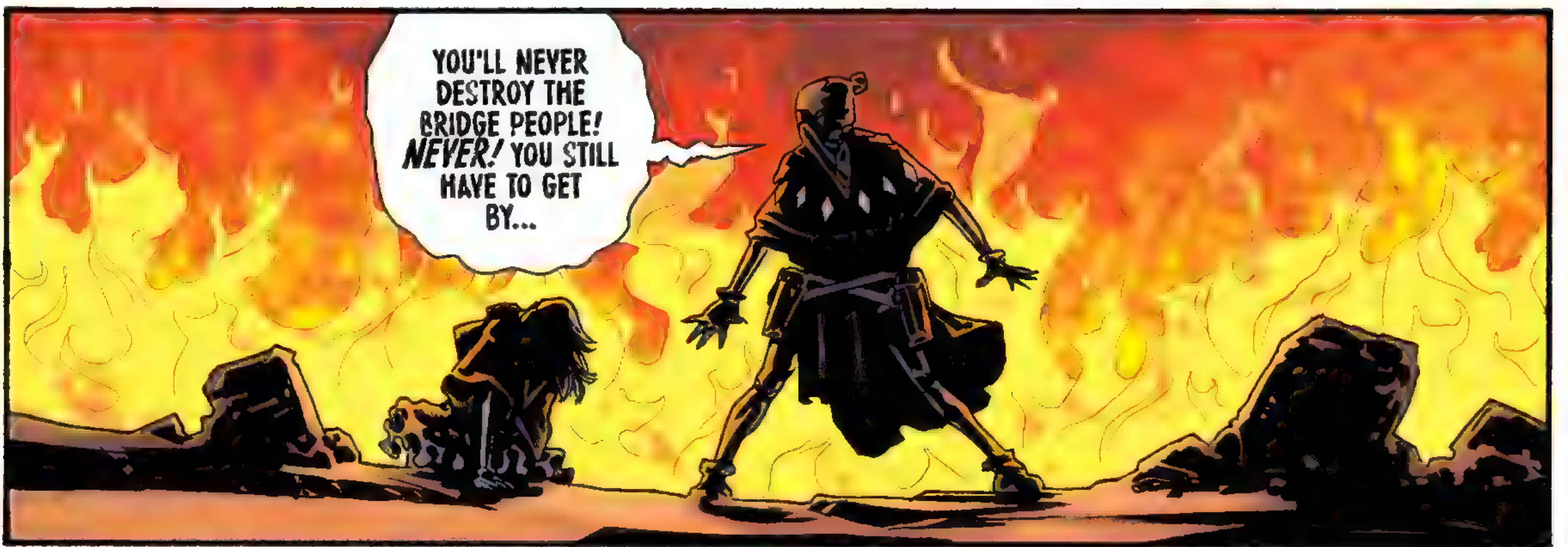














HOLD YOUR FIRE!



SO...THIS IS THE "GHOST," THE "SAINT" WHO HAS RAZED MY CITY AND TROUBLED MY DREAMS!



I'M PLEASED TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE. YOU HAVE CAUSED ME SOME... CONCERN.



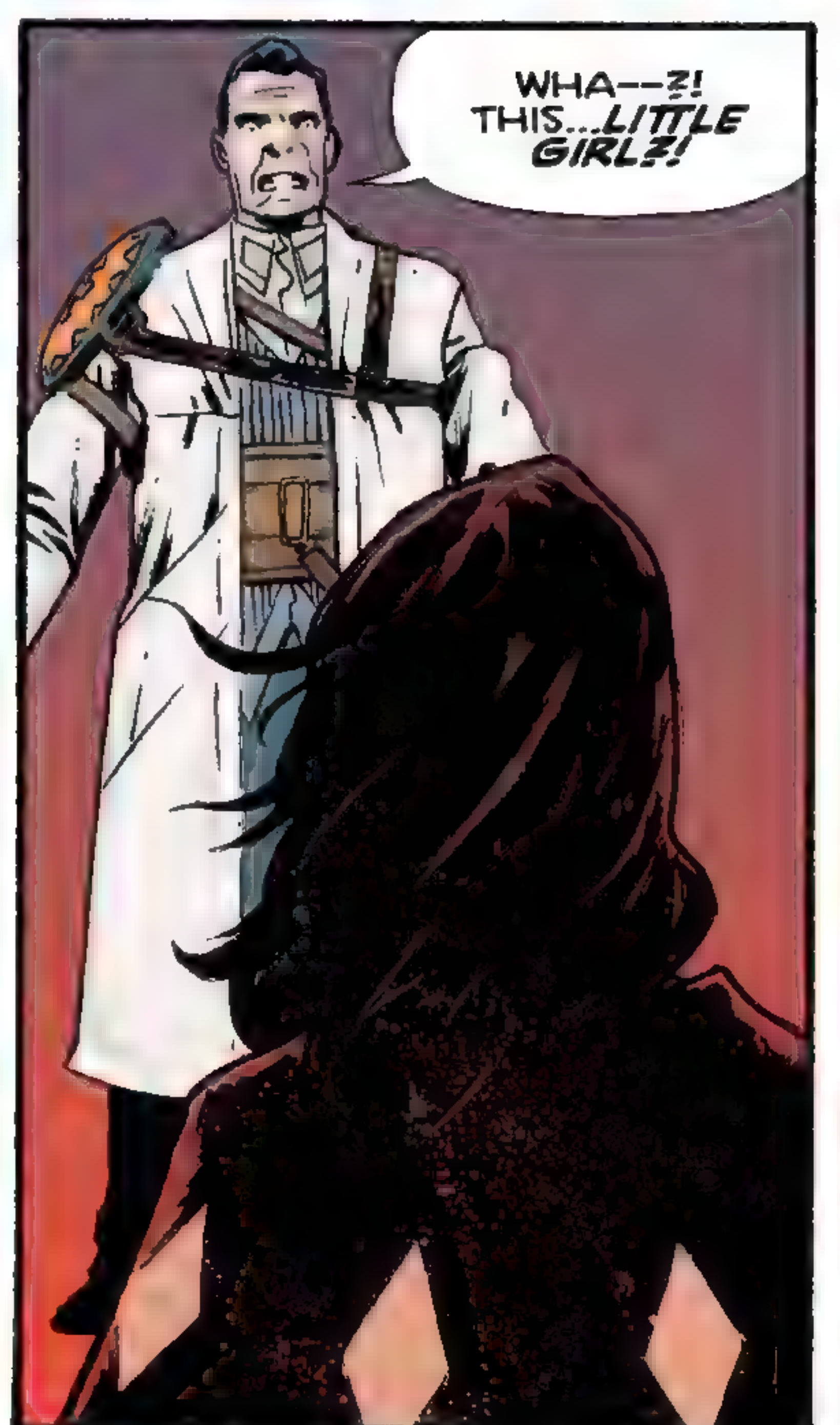
LOOK, YOU'RE NOT A *GHOST* OR A *SAINT* AND I'M NOT THE *BLOODTHIRSTY MONSTER* SOME WOULD MAKE ME OUT TO BE. I'M A LEADER...LIKE YOURSELF--




BUT I *AM* A GHOST. THE GHOST OF *ALL* THOSE WHO'VE FALLEN FIGHTING MEN LIKE YOU. I *AM* A SAINT. THE SAINT TO WHICH THE WRETCHED PRAY FOR DELIVERANCE. AND I'M ALSO...



...A GIRL NAMED *ORCHID* WHO WILL KILL YOU IF YOU HARM ANY MORE OF MY FRIENDS.



WHA--Z! THIS...*LITTLE GIRL*?!


A man with a large, glowing orange and blue gear on his chest. He has a serious, almost angry expression. He is wearing a white shirt and a dark jacket.

NEVER
MIND. I AM
MAKING YOU
AN *OFFER*.

I AM WILLING
TO CALL AN *END*
TO THESE SENSELESS
HOSTILITIES. I WILL
SPARE THE LIVES OF
EVERY MAN, WOMAN,
AND CHILD ON THE
BATTLEFIELD. I'LL EVEN
SPARE *YOUR* LIFE--BUT
YOU MUST DO ONE
SMALL THING.

THE
MASK IS
FATAL IF
WORN BY
ANOTHER.
SO...

DO TELL
ME...IS THAT
POOR SOUL OF
PARTICULAR
IMPORTANCE
TO YOU?

Two women are shown in a fiery, orange and yellow background. One woman is on the left, looking down with a sad expression. The other woman is on the right, looking up with a determined expression.

GOOD, I SEE
SHE IS. PUT THE
MASK ON *HER*.
NOW.

PUT HER
OUT OF HER MISERY--
NO ONE WILL KNOW. YOU
CAN SAVE ALL THE OTHERS.
AND...*YOU CAN SAVE
YOURSELF*

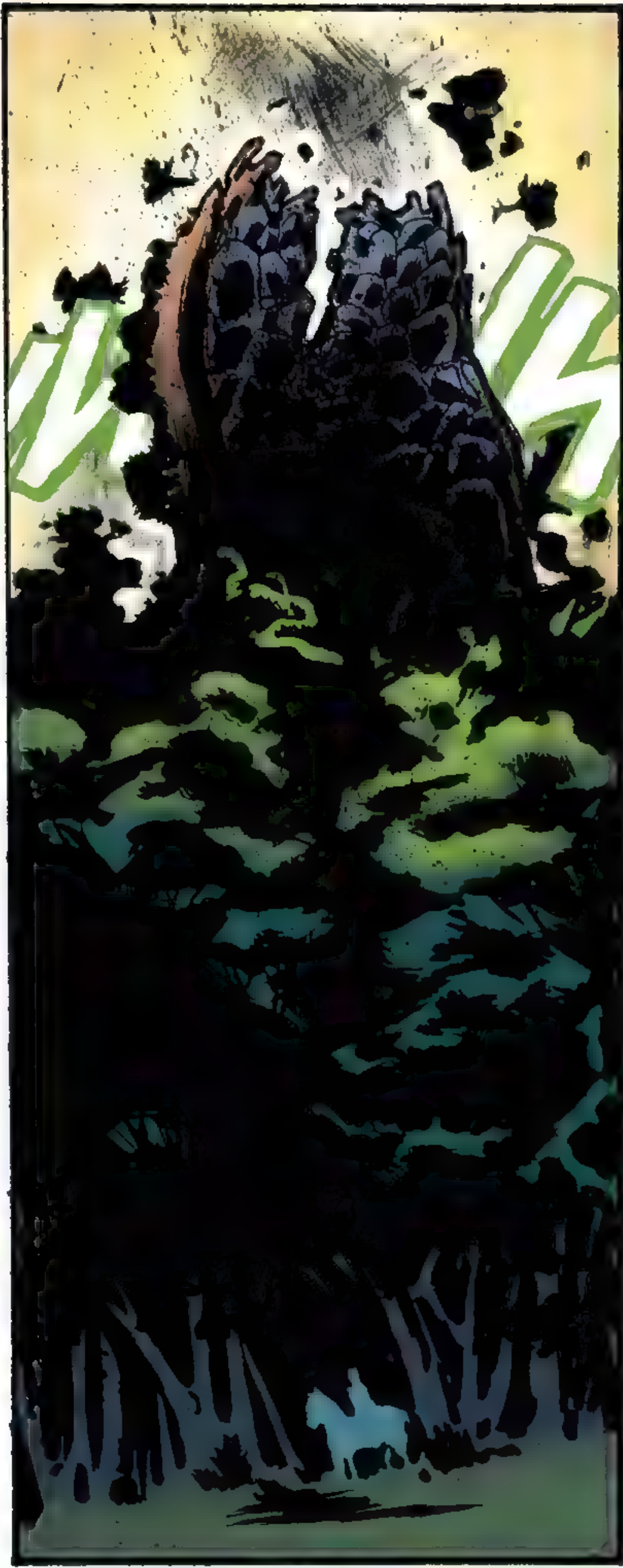
DO THAT
ONE THING...AND
YOU CAN ALL
GO *FREE*.

A woman with long dark hair is holding a large, dark, and somewhat grotesque mask. She has a determined expression.

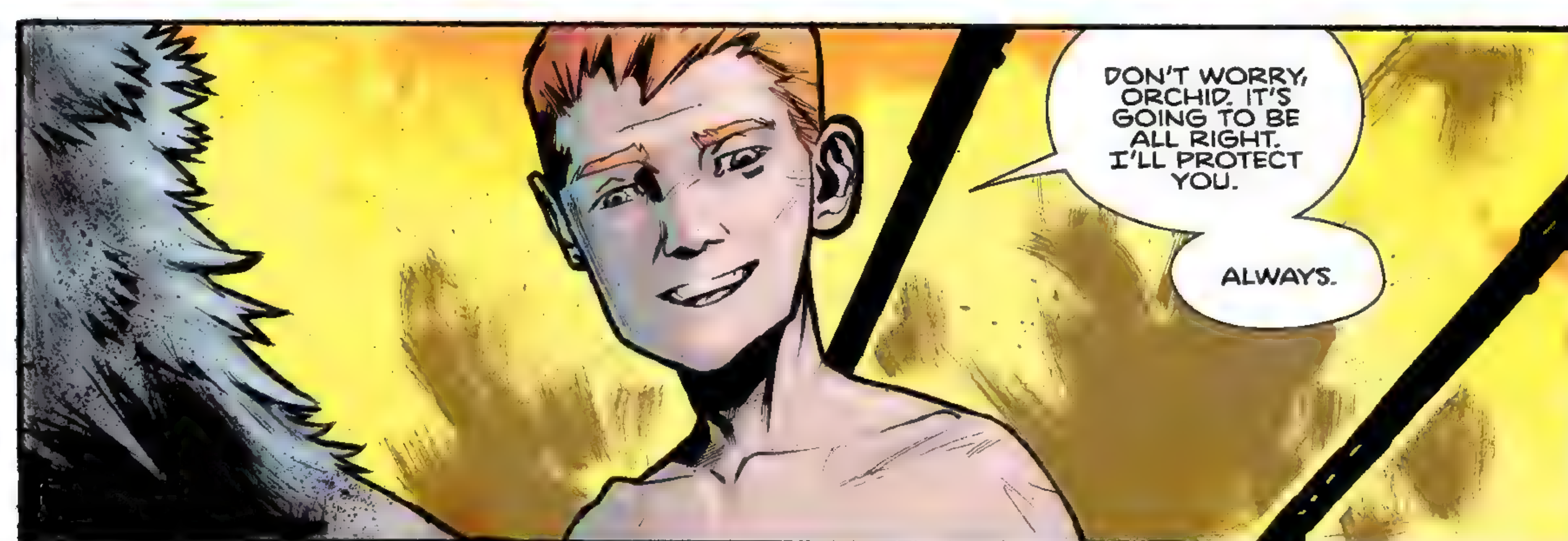
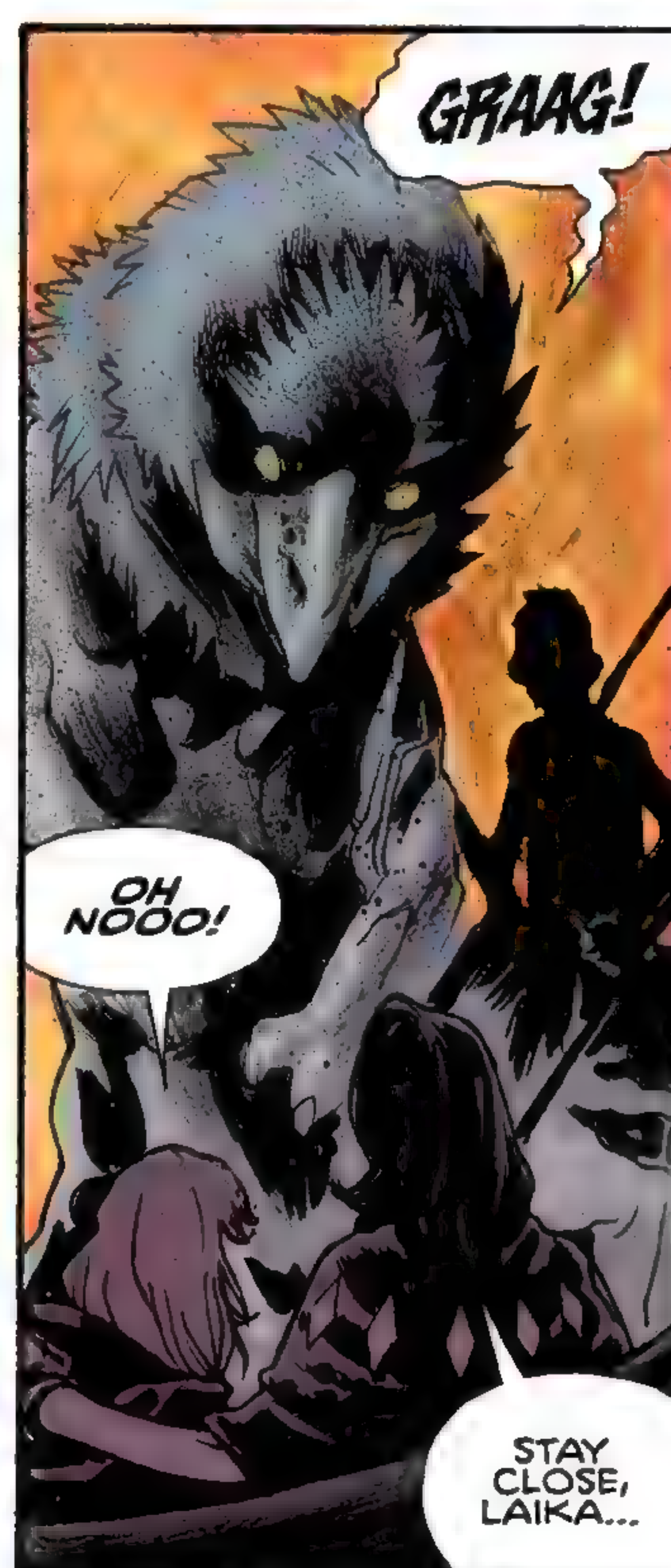
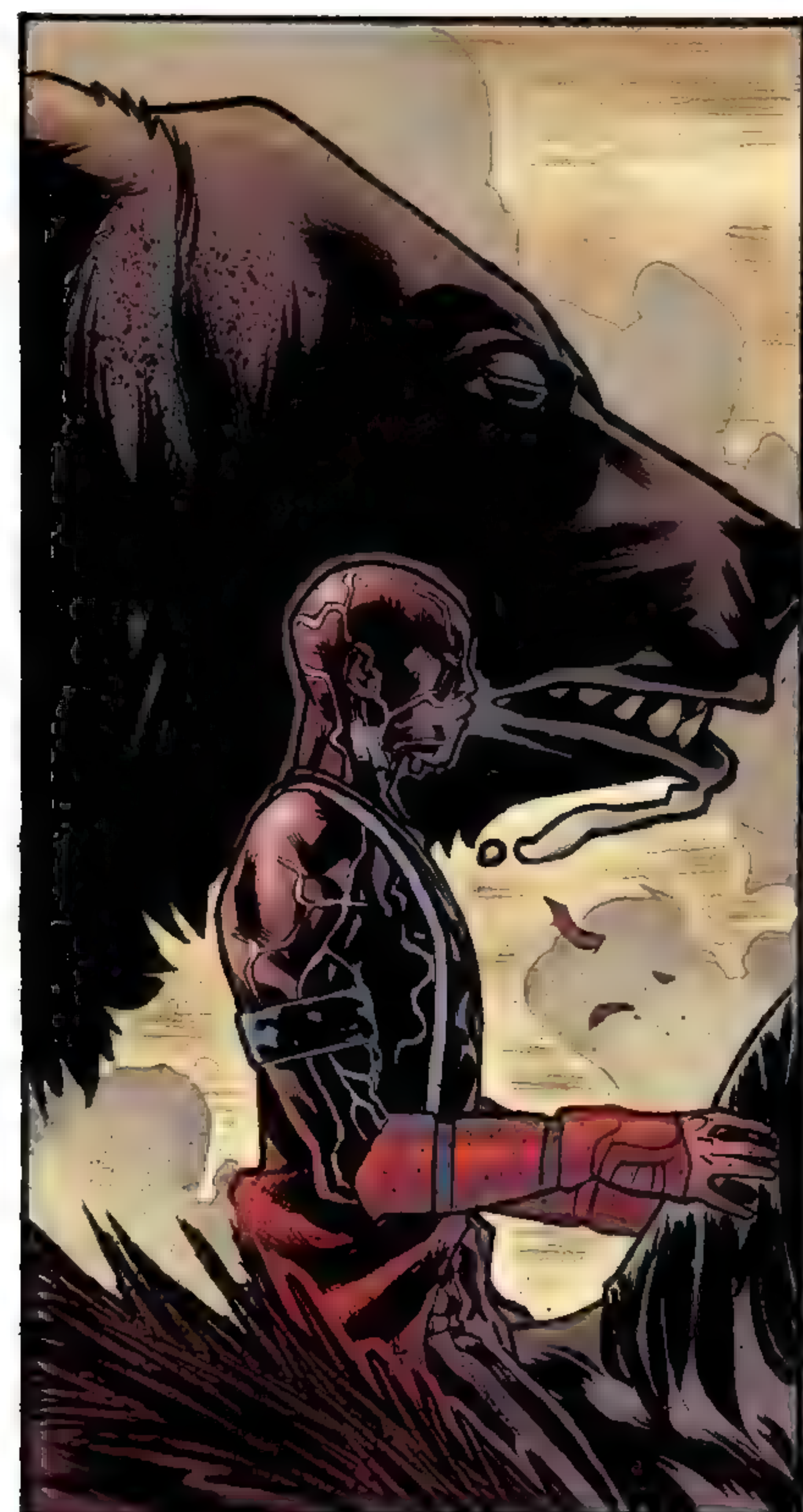
IT'S
JUST...ONE...
INNOCENT...
GIRL.

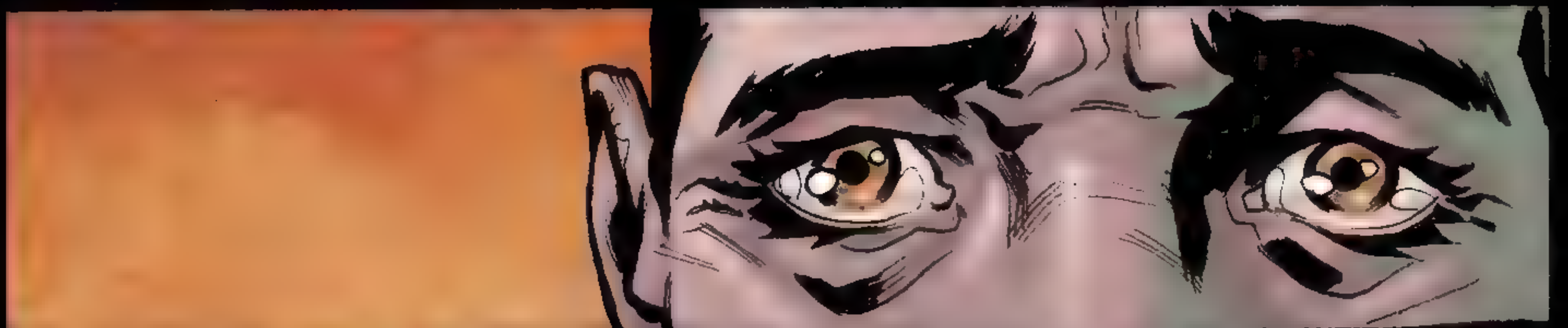
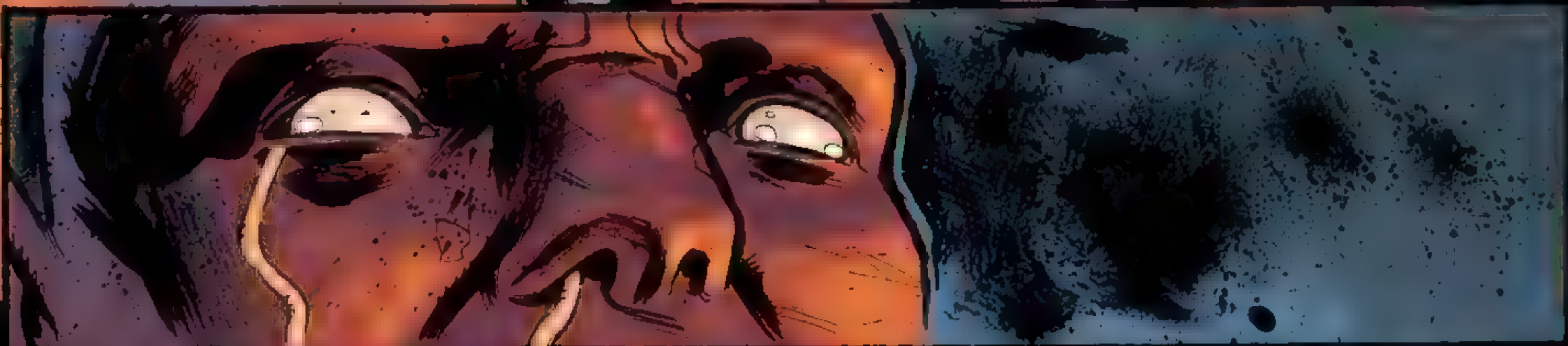
NEVER! IT'S BETTER
TO CONQUER *YOURSELF*
THAN WIN A *THOUSAND*
BATTLES. *THAT* VICTORY
IS *MINE*--

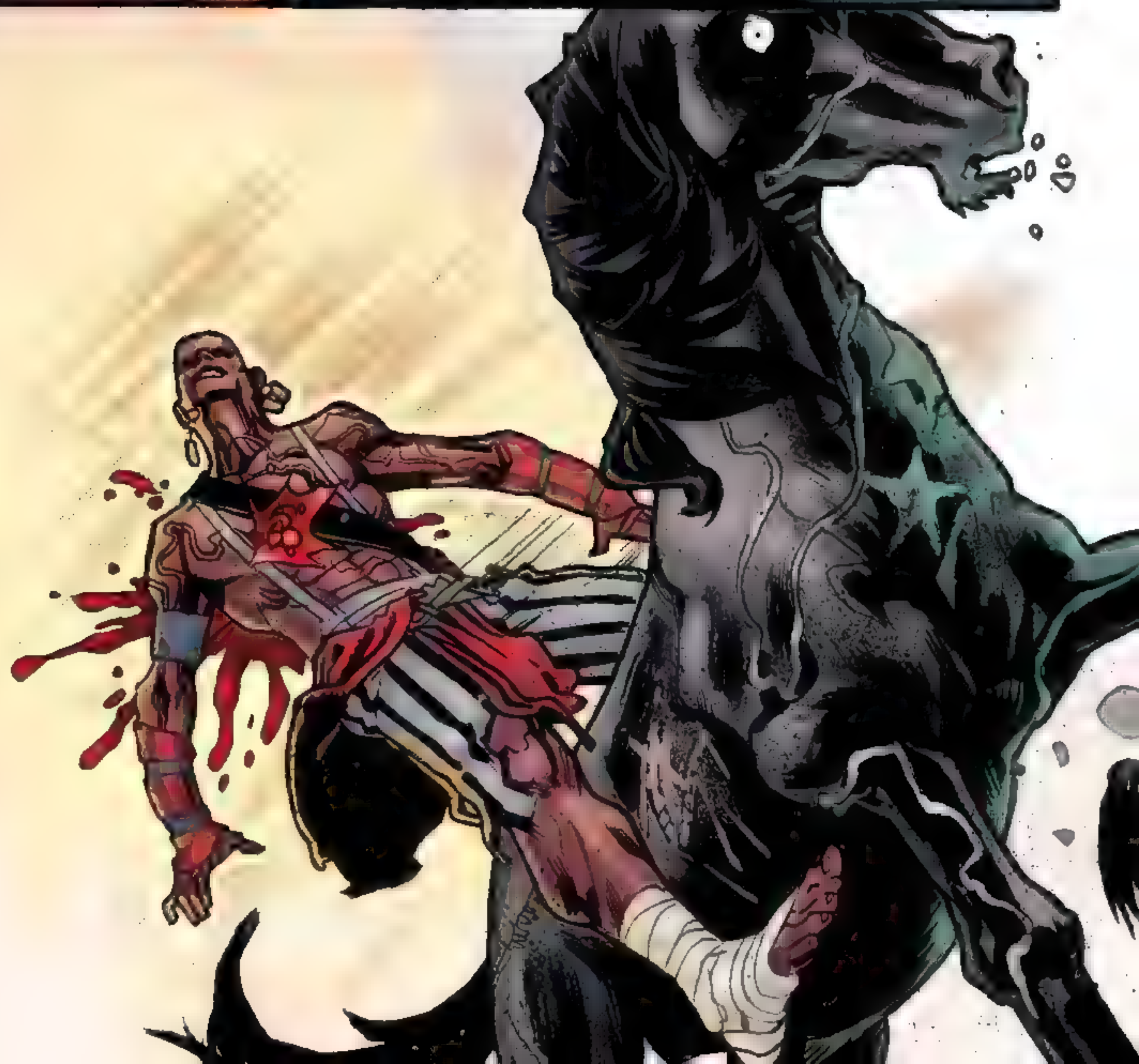
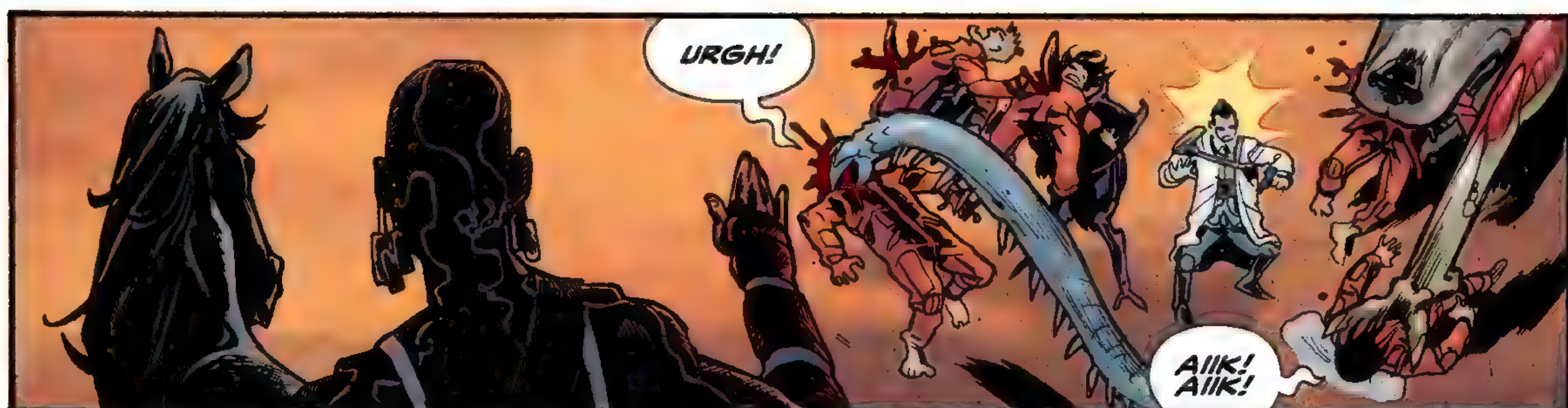
YOU WANT
THIS ACCURSED
MASK? THEN
TAKE IT! AND
DO WITH US AS
YOU WILL!













HAH!
WITH BARRABAS
DEAD, THESE FOUL
CREATURES WILL
DISPERSE AND WE'LL
MOP UP THESE
BRIDGE LICE--

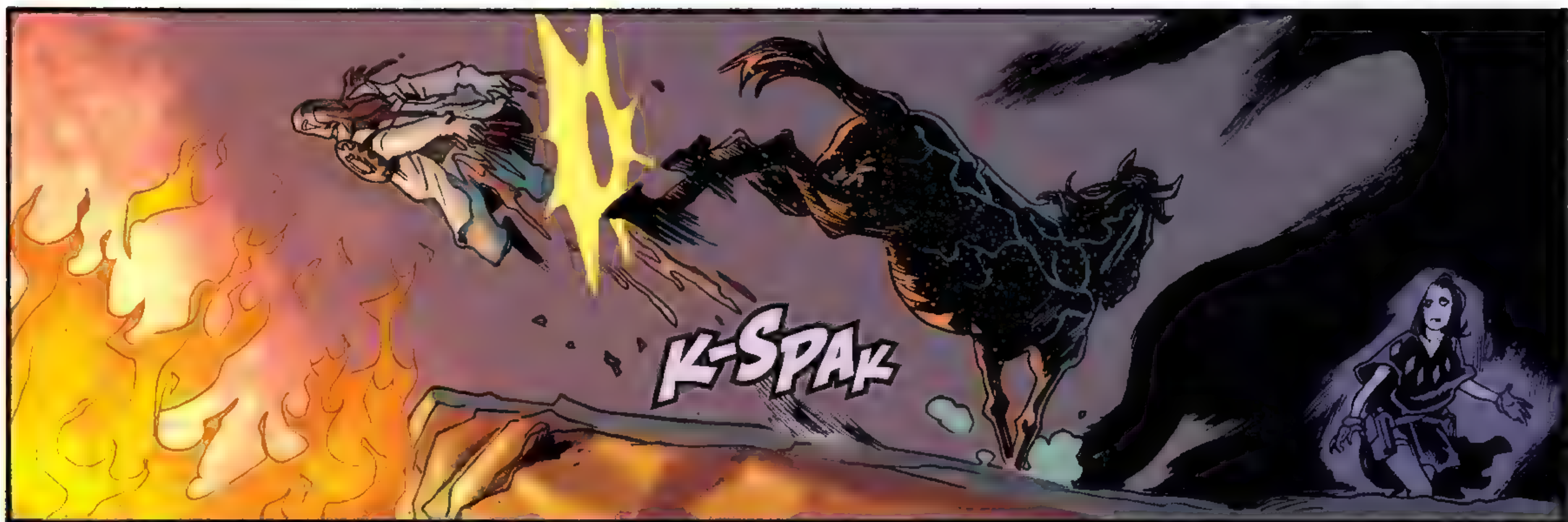
I OWN
EVERYTHING,
AND I INTEND
TO KEEP
IT--

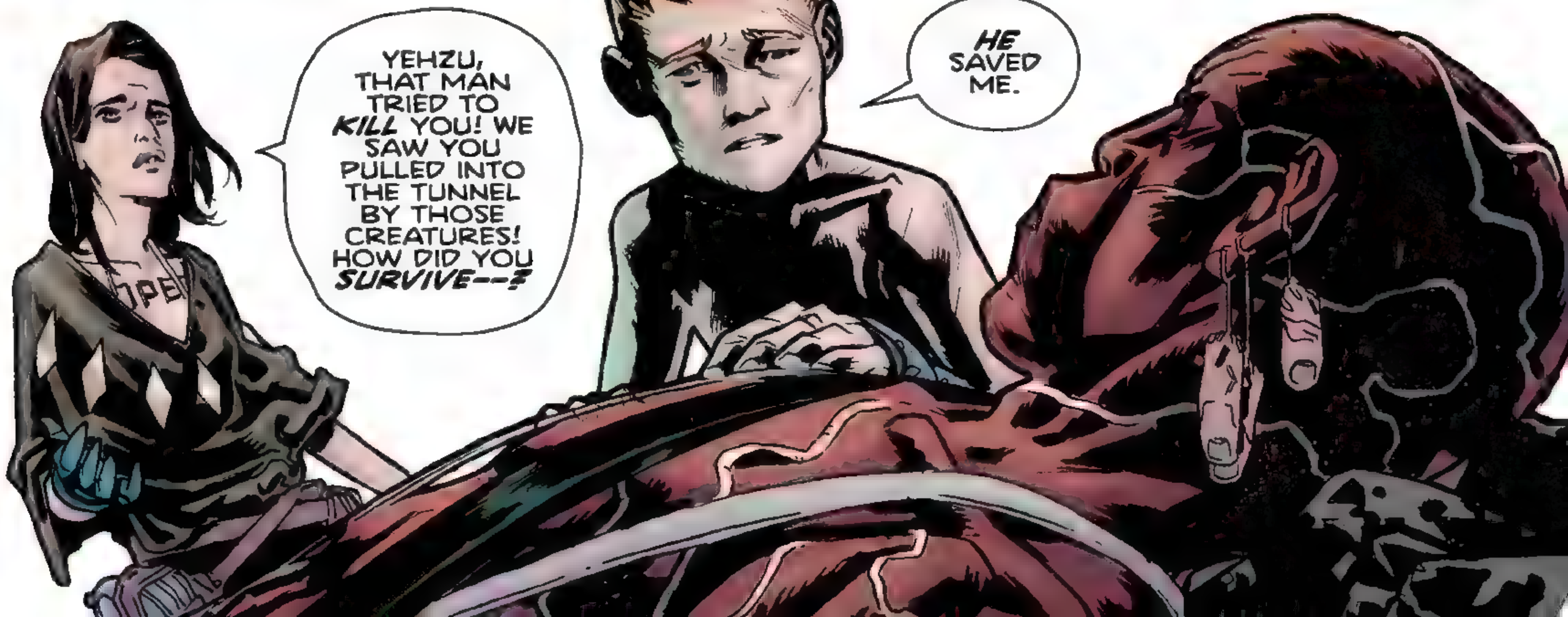
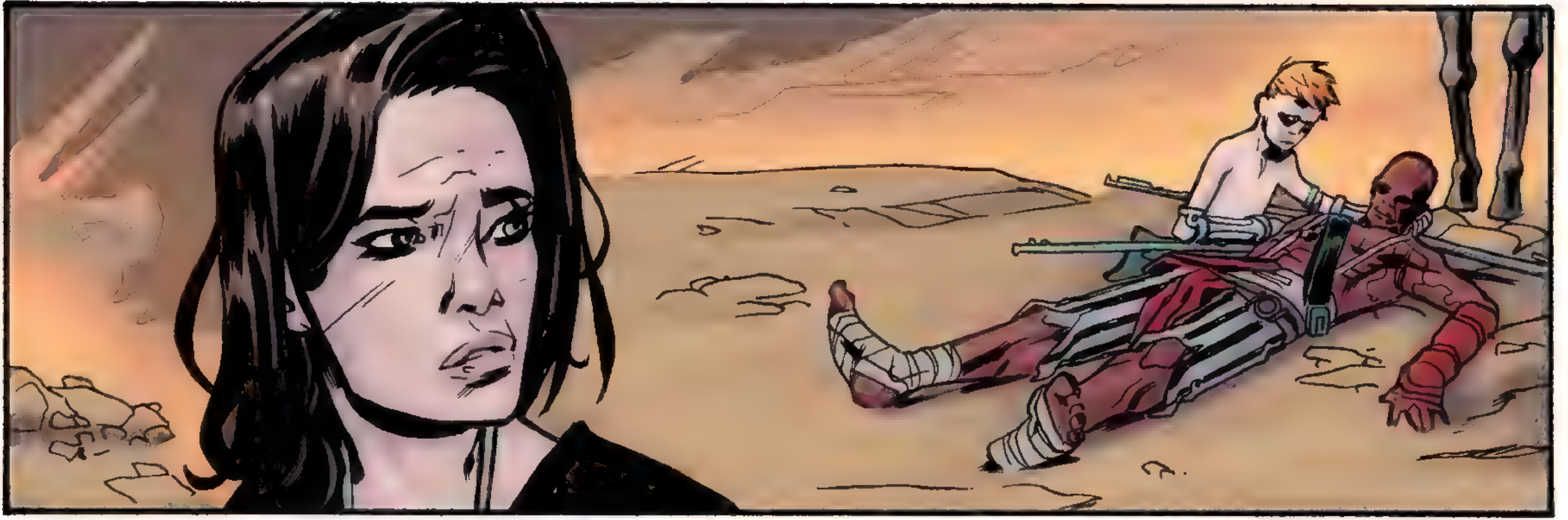


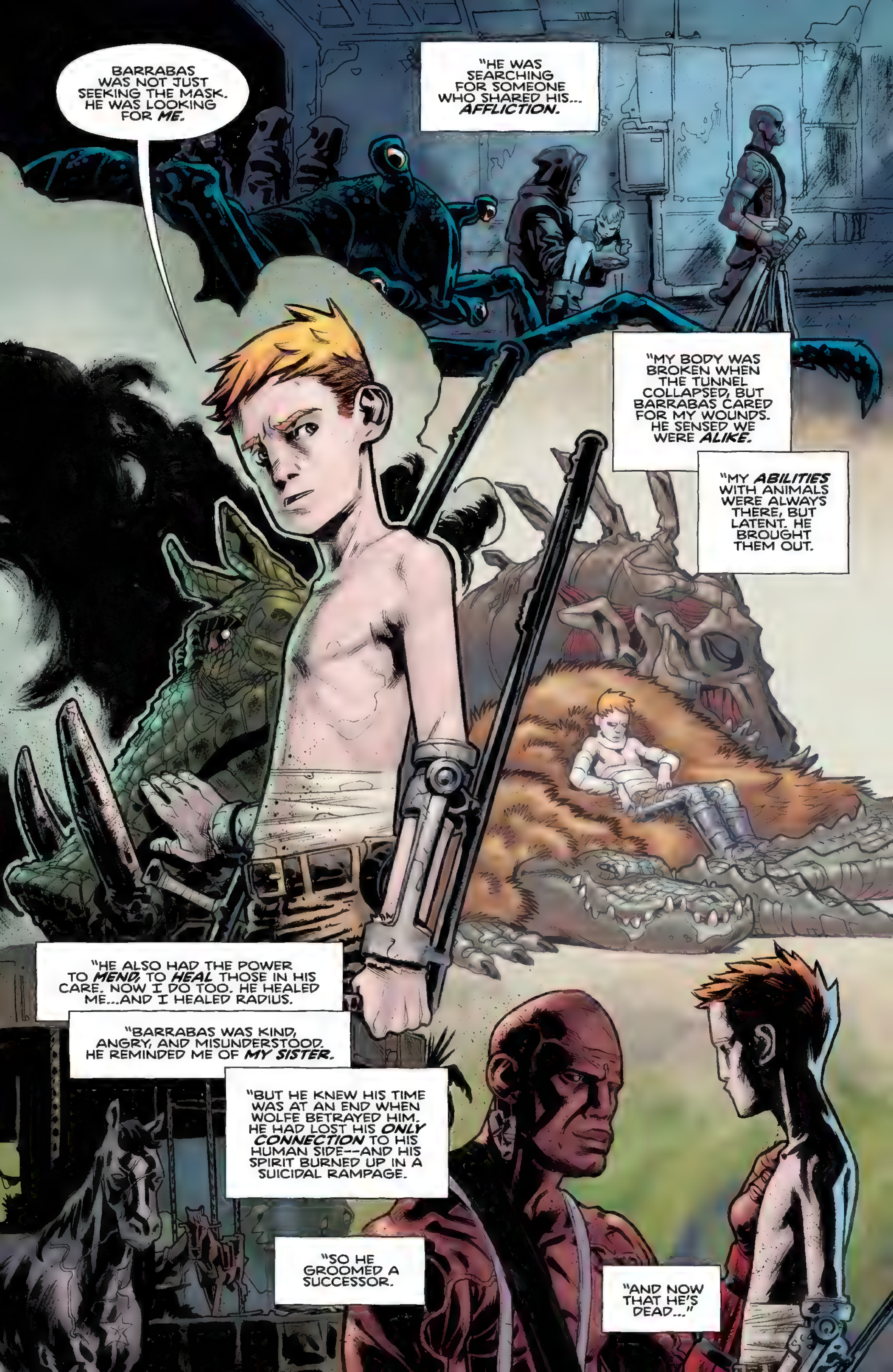
YOU DON'T OWN
ME! AND YOU
DON'T OWN
US!



SPLOOSH







BARRABAS
WAS NOT JUST
SEEKING THE MASK.
HE WAS LOOKING
FOR *ME*.

"HE WAS
SEARCHING
FOR SOMEONE
WHO SHARED HIS...
AFFLICTION."

"MY BODY WAS
BROKEN WHEN
THE TUNNEL
COLLAPSED, BUT
BARRABAS CARED
FOR MY WOUNDS.
HE SENSED WE
WERE *ALIKE*."

"MY *ABILITIES*
WITH ANIMALS
WERE ALWAYS
THERE, BUT
LATENT. HE
BROUGHT
THEM OUT."

"HE ALSO HAD THE POWER
TO *MEND*, TO *HEAL* THOSE IN HIS
CARE. NOW I DO TOO. HE HEALED
ME...AND I HEALED RADIUS."

"BARRABAS WAS KIND,
ANGRY, AND MISUNDERSTOOD.
HE REMINDED ME OF *MY SISTER*."

"BUT HE KNEW HIS TIME
WAS AT AN END WHEN
WOLFE BETRAYED HIM.
HE HAD LOST HIS *ONLY*
CONNECTION TO HIS
HUMAN SIDE--AND HIS
SPIRIT BURNED UP IN A
SUICIDAL RAMPAGE."

"SO HE
GROOMED A
SUCCESSOR."

"AND NOW
THAT HE'S
DEAD..."



I AM
THE LORD OF
THE WILD.

THESE
CREATURES
WON'T HURT YOU
NOW. THEY'RE AS
FIERCE, OR AS GENTLE,
AS THE HAND THAT
GUIDES THEM.
AND THEY'RE MY
FRIENDS.

THEY'LL
RETURN TO
THEIR HOME...
TO MY HOME...
IN PEACE.

Oh,
YEHZU! YOU
CAN'T GO! IT'S
A MIRACLE
YOU'RE ALIVE.
YOU *MUST* STAY
WITH ME--

ORCHID, YOU
KNOW I LOVE YOU.
BUT MY PLACE NOW IS IN
THE WILD, WHERE THERE
IS MUCH WORK TO DO.
YOUR PLACE IS
HERE.

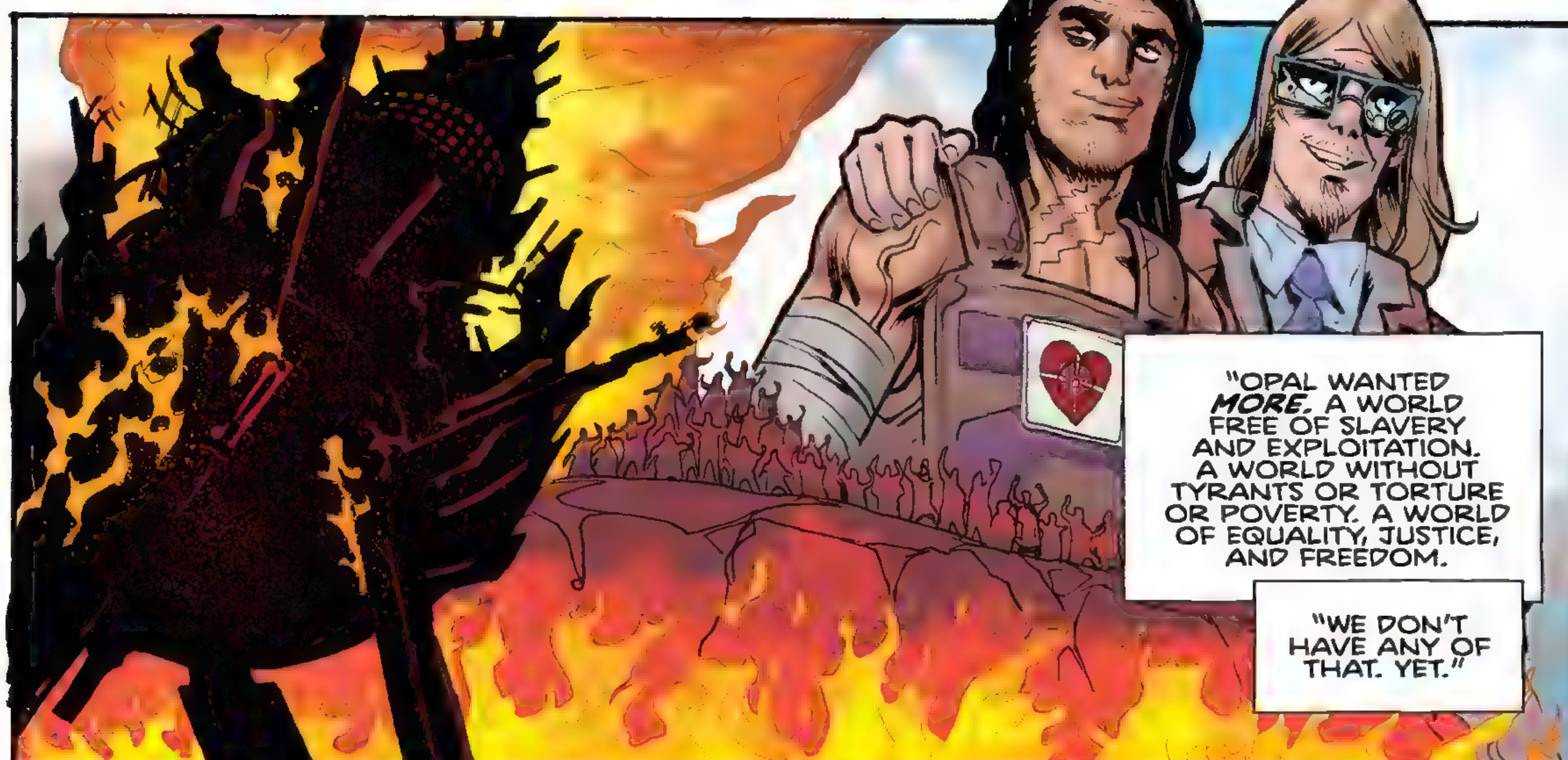


SO
GOODBYE,
DEAR SISTER.
I'LL ALWAYS
CARRY WITH
ME THE
LESSON OF
YOUR BRAVERY
AND YOUR
LOVE.

BE
REALISTIC--
SEEK THE
IMPOSSIBLE.



MAYBE EVERYTHING I WANTED
WAS IMPOSSIBLE, LAIKA. I
DREAMED OF A *HOME* AND
SOME *PEACE*. AND HERE
WE ARE IN THE MIDDLE
OF A BLOODY
BATTLEFIELD.



"OPAL WANTED
MORE. A WORLD
FREE OF SLAVERY
AND EXPLOITATION.
A WORLD WITHOUT
TYRANTS OR TORTURE
OR POVERTY. A WORLD
OF EQUALITY, JUSTICE,
AND FREEDOM.

"WE DON'T
HAVE ANY OF
THAT. YET."



BUT
NOW IT'S *YEAR
ZERO*. WE HAVE
A CHANCE TO
DO THINGS
DIFFERENTLY.

AND...
WE HAVE
EACH
OTHER.

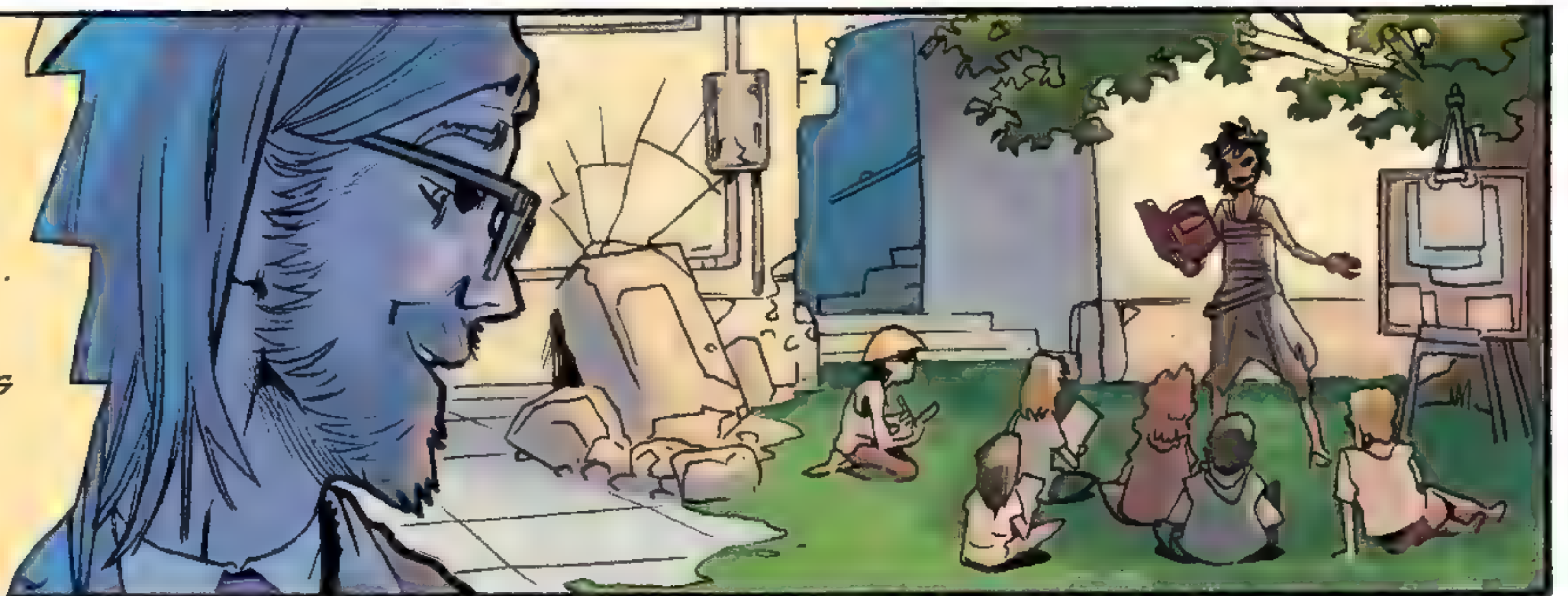
ONE YEAR LATER.

RUINS OF FORTRESS PENUEL.

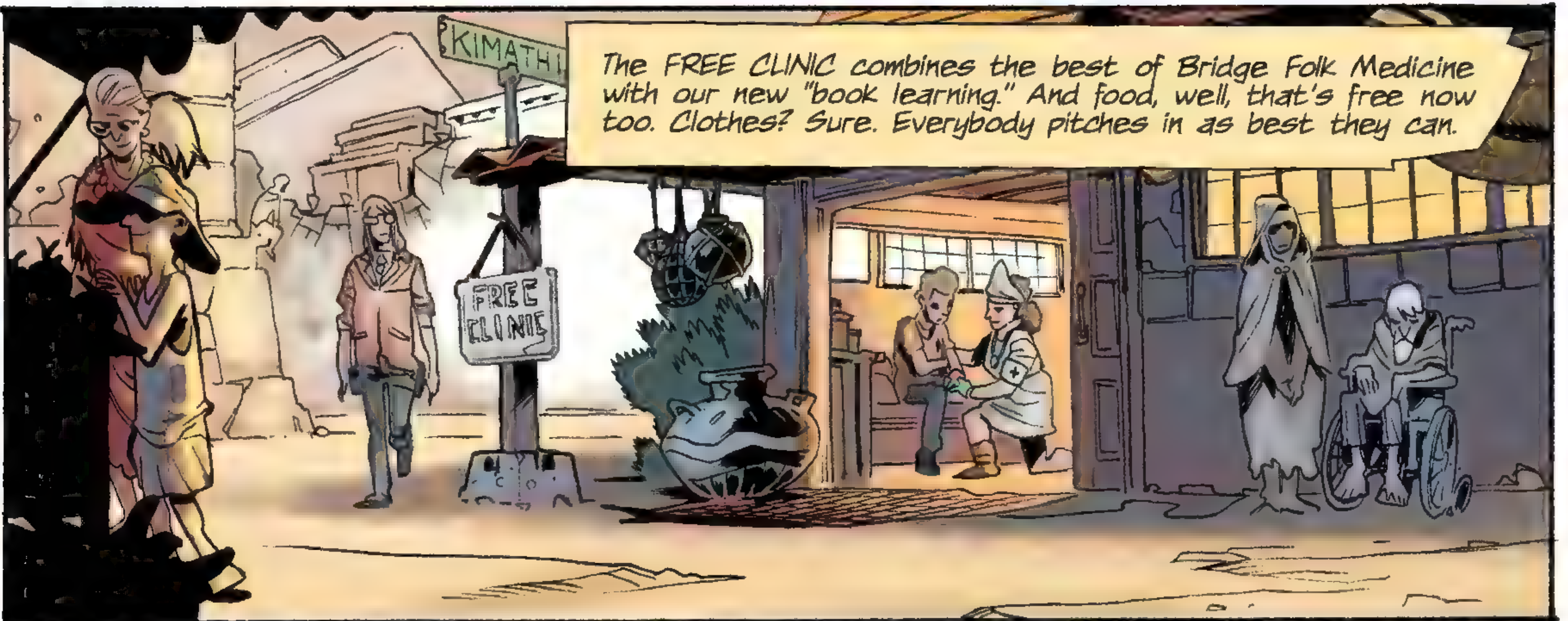
Of course, many wanted to coronate Orchid the **QUEEN** of **NEW PENUEL**. Naturally, smart girl that she is, she'd have none of **THAT**. She insisted there'd be **NO LEADERS** at all. Can you imagine? And people have finally come around to the notion.



The **OPAL SCHOOL OF FREE THOUGHT** is thriving. People can **READ** once again. The youngsters are teaching themselves... and each other. I lent a hand early on, but as there were complaints about my incessant, directionless yammering, I have stepped aside.



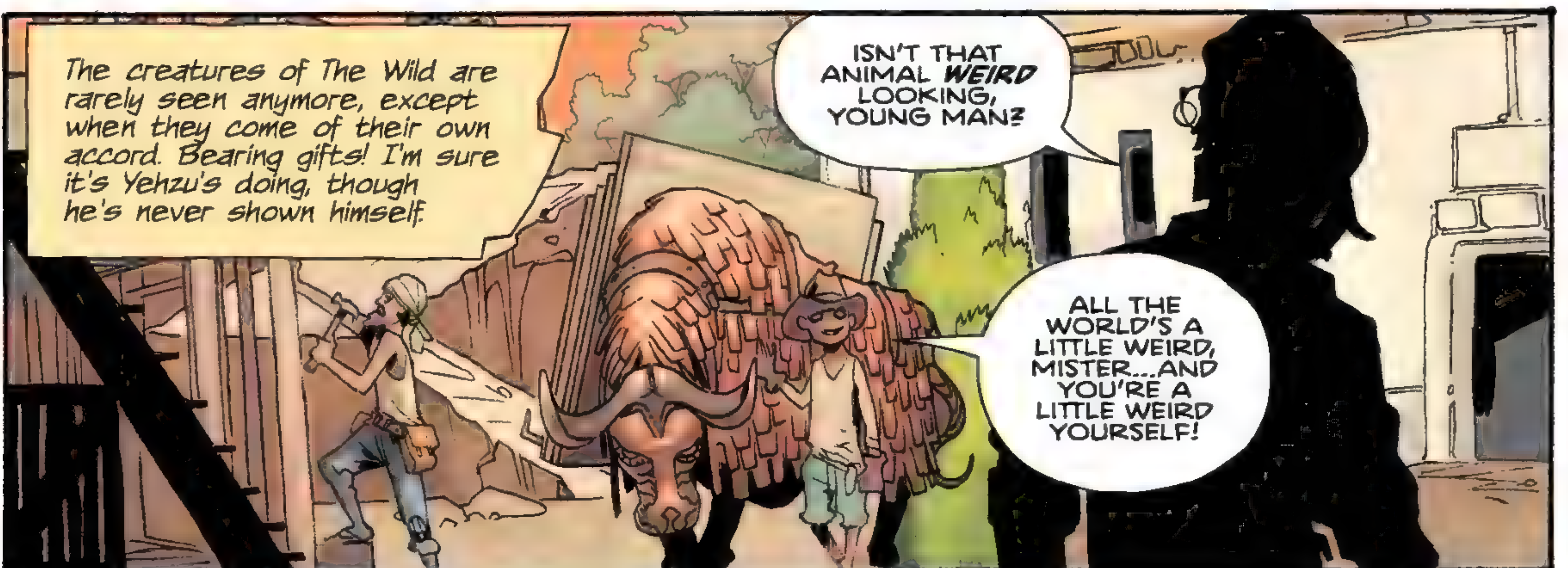
The **FREE CLINIC** combines the best of Bridge Folk Medicine with our new "book learning." And food, well, that's free now too. Clothes? Sure. Everybody pitches in as best they can.



The creatures of The Wild are rarely seen anymore, except when they come of their own accord. Bearing gifts! I'm sure it's Yehzu's doing, though he's never shown himself.

ISN'T THAT **ANIMAL WEIRD** LOOKING, YOUNG MAN?

ALL THE **WORLD'S A LITTLE WEIRD**, MISTER...AND YOU'RE A **LITTLE WEIRD YOURSELF!**





Now, don't get me wrong. It's not as if everyone always gets along. But when the difficult stuff comes up, we do our best to figure it out. Sometimes LOUDLY.



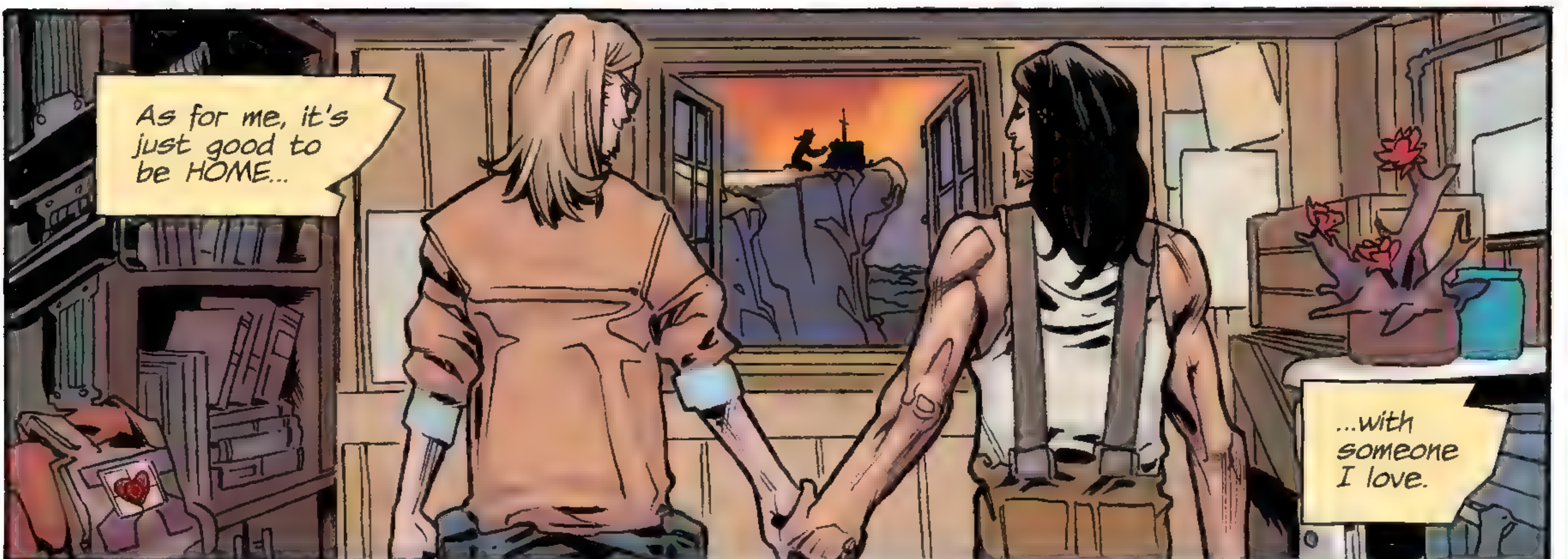
Hi,
SIMON!

Dear Laika is expecting. Soon there will be a new generation who will grow up without the yoke of Tomo Wolfe and his bullies around their necks. We have a long way to go, but for them, by all appearances, it's already a better world.



Anzio, of course, never sees what's been done--only what REMAINS TO BE DONE. He works tirelessly for that just society he imagines. And who knows? Maybe one day...

But for him, what remains to be done TONIGHT is COOKING DINNER.



As for me, it's just good to be HOME...

...with someone I love.

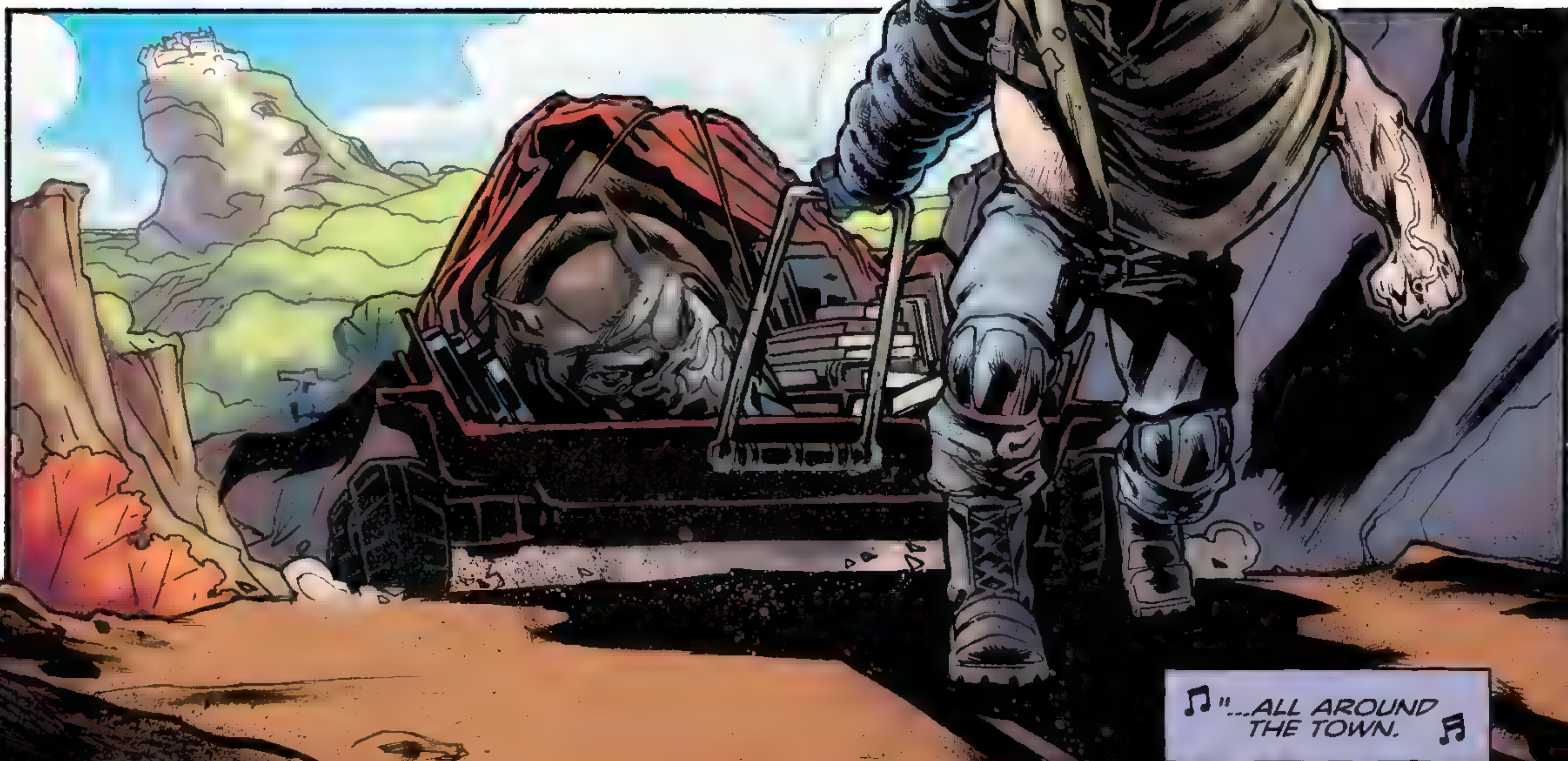
As for Orchid, she just LIVES, quietly reclaiming the years the world stripped away from her.

She was a warrior--part beacon light, part arson fire. But now, she says, the people need a FUTURE, not a weapon.

No one really knows how much she gave, how much she LOST, to make all this happen. The mask LIBERATED us, but it CHANGED her. I don't think all those voices, those ghosts, went away entirely.

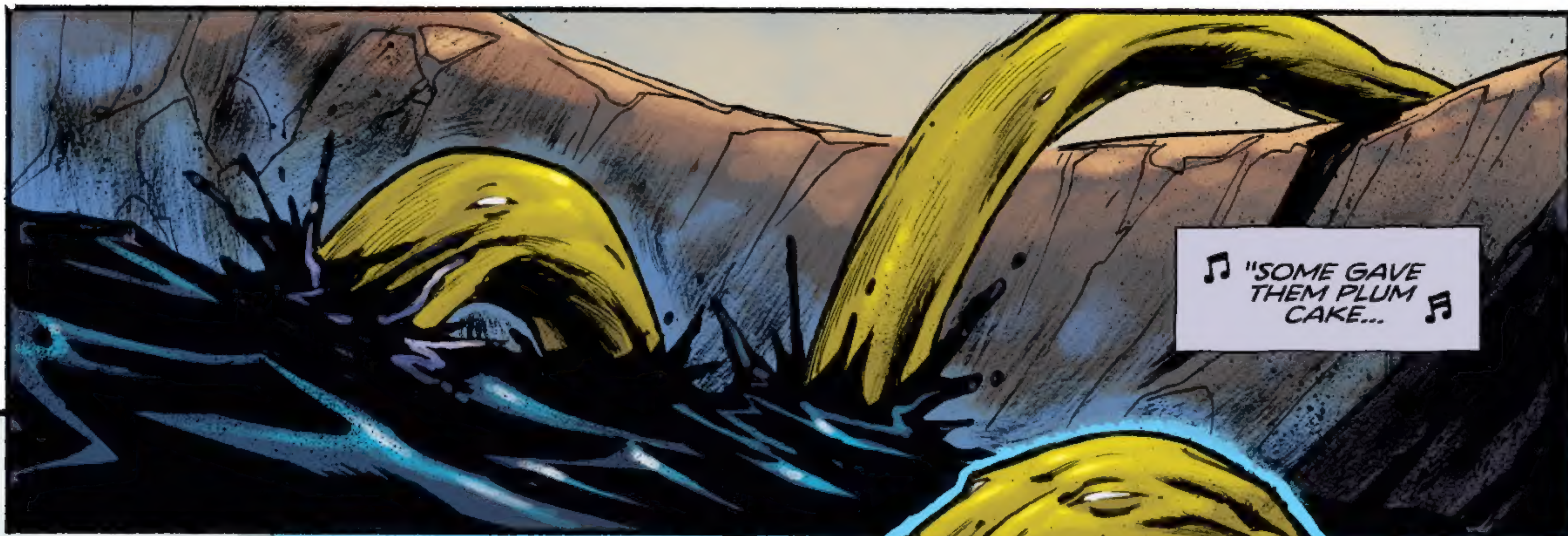
And so she comes HERE. Every day. The little gravesite she's made for Opal... and she tends it with great care.

And Anzio and I are expecting her for dinner tonight.

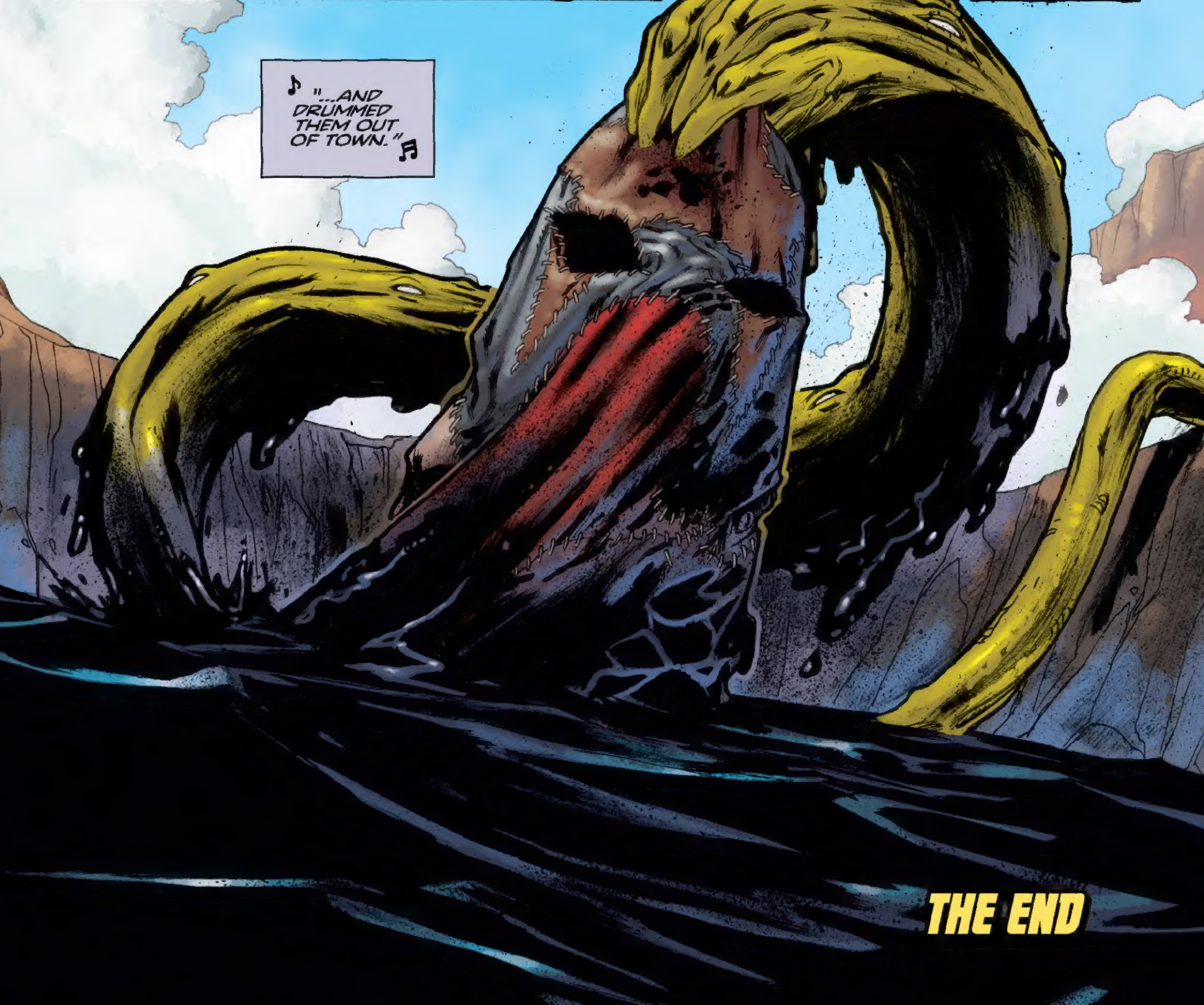




♪ "SOME GAVE
THEM WHITE
BREAD, SOME
GAVE THEM
BROWN." ♪



♪ "SOME GAVE
THEM PLUM
CAKE..." ♪



♪ "...AND
DRUMMED
THEM OUT
OF TOWN." ♪

THE END

AFTERWORD

I DIDN'T CHOOSE TO BE A GUITAR PLAYER. Guitar playing chose me.

As a teen, I dabbled in art and acting. I even thought about being a forest ranger. Something about being a mailman appealed to me as well. Then, I started playing guitar and it felt like a *calling*. Political activism, same deal. I felt a *compulsion* to swing back at the injustice I saw in my hometown—and the world at large. Comic writing too. I had this story, *Orchid*, that just *demand*ed to get out. And here it is.

I feel very fortunate. I think I was *meant* to be a musician, an activist, a writer. And here I am. Why? Well, my mom, a single, public high school teacher, was able to scrape together fifty bucks for my first guitar to unlock that dream. There were books around that stoked the fires of my political determination. And, by the time I wrote *Orchid*, I was a fairly well-known musician and the nice people at Dark Horse took my call.

I think everyone, without exception, deserves to be the person they were meant to be. But, literally, billions of people aren't so lucky. Why? Poverty. Crushing poverty. The next Mozart is likely right now slaving away in an Indonesian sweatshop. The doctor who was meant to cure cancer is instead sweeping the floors of a maquiladora along the Mexican border. Manmade circumstances that deny the essence of who we might be, who we should be, who we were meant to be.

Wrestling with personal demons and societal shackles, *Orchid* and her friends are simply trying to figure out who *they* were meant to be and how the hell they can be it, given the circumstances into which they were born.

The tilted playing field of our world is not so different from *Orchid*'s. Maybe that's why you picked up this

volume. Or maybe it was for the cool monsters. Either way, I'd like to thank you all for coming along on this journey. Fans of the series from all over the globe have been so supportive, and I deeply appreciate it. Thanks to the entire Dark Horse family, especially Dave Land (for the encouragement and confidence), Sierra Hahn (for always being right), Jim Gibbons (my Libertyville brother, who brought it home), and Scott Allie and Mike Richardson, who have helped me realize this story in an uncompromised and uncompromising way. Thanks to Jack Olsen and Anthony Arnone, who gave me invaluable feedback early on. Thanks to Gerard Way for passing my manuscript on to Dark Horse and getting the ball rolling. Thanks to Kevin Mills, Carl Restivo, and the Freedom Fighter Orchestra for assistance in recording *Orchid*'s musical score. And a huge thanks to the creative team: Massimo Carnevale for his dramatic covers, Nate Piekos of Blambot for his care and patience with the lettering, Dan Jackson for the incredible colors that really brought *Orchid*'s world to life, and the unquestionable MVP of the project, Scott Hepburn, whose illustrations have rocketed him to the upper echelon of his craft. Scott has been one of the most talented and pleasant collaborators I've ever had the pleasure of working with in any medium.

And finally, thanks to all the rebels and radicals who—with clear intent and purpose—have stood up in their place and time, against whatever odds, and fought for a better, more just world. Because, I suppose, it was what they were meant to do.

TOM MORELLO

An early character sketch of *Orchid* and Yehzu by Scott Hepburn



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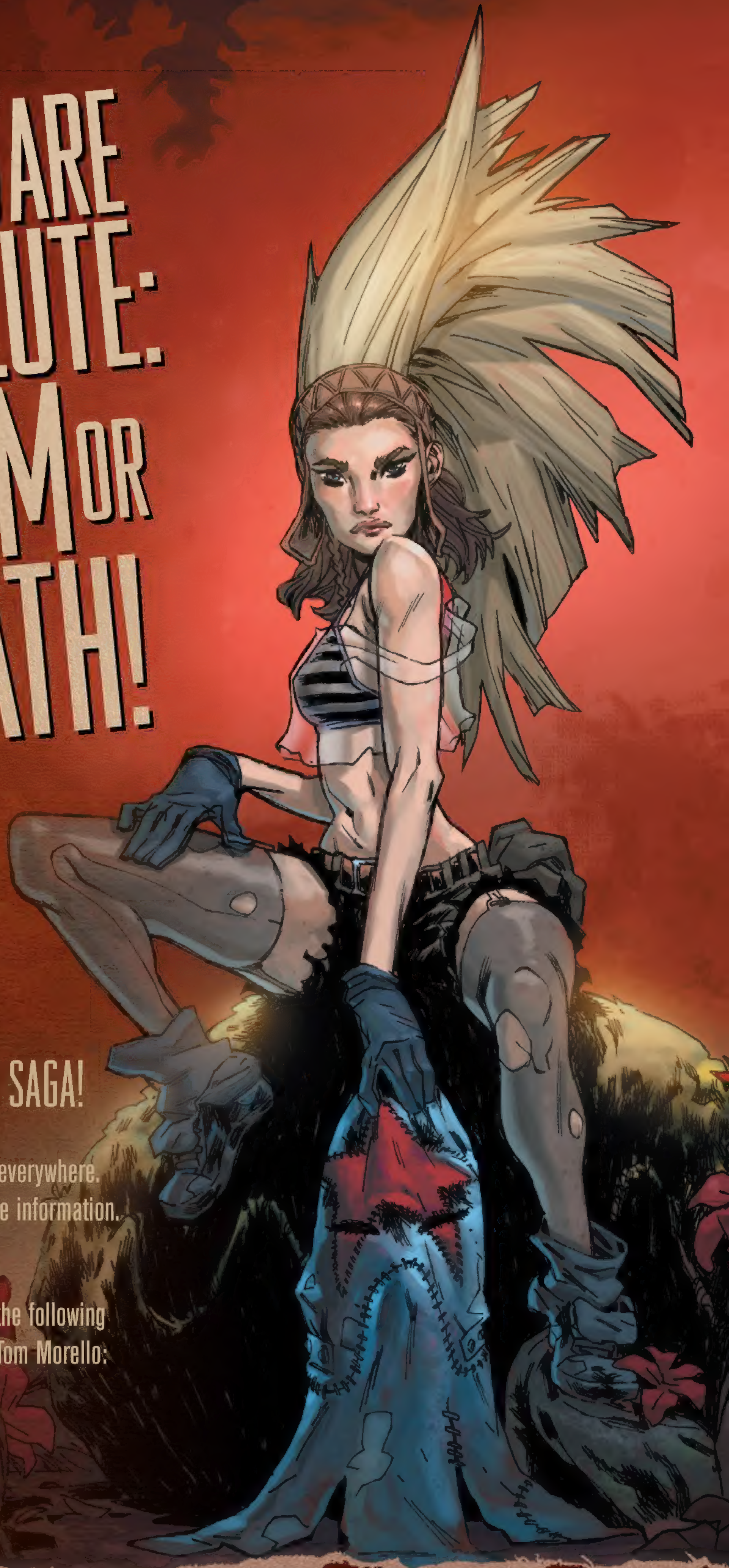
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